

## What I Did on My Ten-Year Vacation

by María Christina Blanco

I recently attended a BBWN brunch – the first bi community event (except for Pride) that I'd been to in nearly a decade – and was warmly welcomed by long time and new members alike. After playing tug-of-war with our hostesses' new baby over the latest issue of *Bi Women*, I read the 25th anniversary edition with great interest. When Robyn asked me to write on "Children in Our Lives," I remembered the last time I was published in *Bi Women*, in 2000, and I thought about how much things change and how much they stay the same.

A headline in that issue announced the legalization of same-sex marriage in the Netherlands, the first anywhere in the world. Now, equal marriage rights in our own state, Massachusetts is yesterday's news, while tomorrow's big stories will be about the fight for marriage equality in states that have overturned or banned it in November: California, Florida, and Arizona. Back then, I was among those of us in the community who identified as multiracial or multi-cultural and submitted articles reflecting on our realities for the theme "Bicultural, Biracial, Bisexual." And as I predicted in my piece, entitled "Complex Lives," here I am in 2008, still wrestling to integrate and validate all the aspects of my identity on a daily basis, LOL.

A picture ran with my article of me holding my infant daughter in my arms. It was taken by my daughter's father, whom I lived with at the time, and would later marry and eventually divorce, after going through drama that rivals that on my favorite TV show, *Ugly Betty*! In addition to being a new mom, I became a family caregiver after he sustained a brain injury, I saw him through an immigration appeal, attended college while working and with a toddler in tow, I moved nine times in the first six years of my daughter's life (interspersed with stints of couch-surfing), and I struggled to keep my sanity through betrayal in my relationship and the trials of having a loved one with addiction issues. Meanwhile, I became a community health worker, moved along slowly toward a college degree that I hoped would lead me into the public health field, and raised my daughter essentially as a single mother. Today, I am very proud of my strong, smart, healthy, loving almost – (gasp!) – nine year old. I am blessed to own my own home now. I hope to finish college soon, and start my own business.

For the better part of this decade, I have been MIA in the bi community. But I never stopped affirming (in ways large and small) the integrity and beauty of the diversity of human love, relationships, and sexual expression. During stretches where my mental health suffered under the strain of all the drama, I have felt MIA in my own life – there have been times when I've questioned whether I even had a sexuality at all, let alone a sexual orientation! But I never stopped honoring the fluidity of my own attractions, responses, cultural ties, and relationship history. Coming back to BBWN feels like coming full circle. I realized that day at the brunch – as I struggled to explain my seemingly on-again/off-again relation-

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## Kids Keep me Closeted

by Lacey Louwagie

I heard from a very credible source (OK, it was actually an episode of *Queer as Folk*) that our sexual orientation is determined by the time we are six years old. This makes me think of receiving my sex education from my older sister when I was five, complete with a definition of the word gay. That education also included a peek at some naughty calendars: one with erotic pictures of women, and another with erotic pictures of men. When I was alone, I'd sneak peeks at the calendars, equally fascinated by both of them. I didn't have the words for my fascination, and I wasn't old enough to judge my curiosity as perverse. It simply was what it was.

Now that I'm an adult, kids have become an important part of my life. I'm godmother to twin girls whom I adore. They just turned seven. They seem so young that it's hard for me to believe they could possibly be old enough to know anything about sex, let alone have a definitive sexual orientation. Yet, my own memories paint a different picture of childhood than the one I feel comfortable projecting onto kids as an adult. When my sister and I cleaned out our old toy room a couple years ago, one of my goddaughters eagerly adopted all the female Barbie dolls, but refused to touch the males with a ten-foot pole—even after much urging from her mother. As someone who sees so much of the world through a queer lens, I couldn't help but wonder.

Although I've always been bisexual, I came out late in life – at the age of twenty-two – after I'd been living alone in a new city for an entire year. Having no friends or family around projecting their expectation of straightness upon me was key to my ability to accept who I really was. One of the benefits of coming out so late in life was that I had the confidence – and the security, since I was no longer dependent upon parents or other adults – to be out in most areas of my life. I came out to my closest friends a month after coming out to myself; I was out in my workplace, to my sisters, and to my mother within a year. I have no qualms about checking "bisexual" on dating and social networking sites – in fact, I won't use dating sites that don't allow me to check bisexual – or letting my sexual orientation slip into conversation with new people I meet.

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Bisexuals having our quiche and eating it too at the October brunch!



## HONOR ROLL

Debbie Block-Schwenk  
Carla Imperial  
Megan Jewett  
Deb Morley  
Ellyn Ruthstrom  
Lisa  
Lisa Silveria  
Gail Zacharias  
Robyn Ochs  
Anne Stanback  
and  
everyone who  
wrote for this  
issue.

And many more  
fabulous people!  
You know who  
you are!

Bi Women is  
published quarterly.

Editor:  
**Robyn Ochs**  
Arts & Culture  
Editor:  
**Lisa Silveria**  
Calendar Editor:  
**Ellyn Ruthstrom**

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## From your editor

*I am so swamped between work, school, and parenting that I never got around to writing something. I really did want to – but life gets away from me sometimes. —Nora*

I received several emails similar to this from women who had intended to write something. Several others, when asked to write, responded, "Great topic, but I'm just too busy. I do intend to find time to read the newsletter though!"

Since the theme of this issue is "Children in Our Lives," I wasn't too surprised.

But luckily several women were able to find time to write. And what a packed issue this is! In addition to several excellent essays on this issue's theme, we offer various other features, including a recap of the November elections; a report from the APA conference; and an interview with Myriam Brito, a leader in the Mexican bi movement.

Remember: this is your forum. Please write in. Tell us about your life. Share your stories. We welcome poetry; short fiction; book, film, art and performance reviews; interviews; letters to the editor; artwork, and more. Our email address is [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com).

Finally, if you can afford to help out, we could use your financial support. We send newsletters to community centers, youth and college groups. We give out newsletters at events. We have a policy of sending *Bi Women* to any woman who wants it, regardless of her ability to pay. And it costs quite a bit to do all of this. You can support bi visibility by sending us a donation, or simply by becoming a paid subscriber.

Bi for now,  
Robyn



October brunch at Carla & Megan's

## Next in Bi Women

The Bi Women theme for  
upcoming issues:

**Mar/Apr/May: ALLIES**

What does it mean to be an ally?  
How can gay/lesbian/bi/trans people  
support one other? Are allies impor-  
tant to you? Do you have any heart-  
warming stories to tell about non-bi  
people standing up for bi people, or  
vice versa?

**Deadline: February 10, 2009**

Upcoming themes will include:

The Youth Issue; Trans/Gender; Fantasy;  
Choice; Out at Work; and more.

*Send your suggestions for future topics to  
[biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com)*

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newsletter are copyrighted by the  
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The Boston Bisexual Women's Network is a feminist, not-for-profit collective organization whose purpose is to bring women together for support and validation. It is meant to be a safe environment in which women of all sexual self-identities, class backgrounds, racial, ethnic and religious groups, ages, abilities and disabilities are welcome. Through the vehicles of discussion, support, education, outreach, political action and social groups related to bisexuality, we are committed to the goals of full acceptance as bisexuals within the gay and lesbian community, and to full acceptance of bisexuality and the liberation of all gay and transgender people within the larger society.



## Bis Around the World: Myriam Brito, Mexico City

by Robyn Ochs

Myriam, 35, was born and raised in Mexico City, where she has lived her entire life. Her life partner is a "wonderful" man with whom she has been involved since she was fifteen; they married six years ago. They have no human children, but they do have canine ones: Coco, a Schnauzer, and Camila, a Cocker Spaniel. Myriam loves reading, especially poetry, playing with her dogs, spending time with her husband, drinking beer with her friends, and sleeping. She also enjoys studying: she completed a bachelors degree in sociology and a masters in political science, focusing on political theory, feminist theory, gender and sexual diversity. She works as a researcher in a center for gender studies. I interviewed Myriam for *Bi Women*:

RO: Please tell us your coming out story.

MB: When I was 24 or 25, I attended a workshop on body emotions and there I recognized that in addition to men, I was attracted to women. When I looked at women, I not only "admired" how they were dressed or how they looked; they evoked in me something more: erotic desire. At the time, I was at university studying sociology, and I had begun to explore feminism. I was in a group of friends who got together to read about feminism and share our experiences. At one of these meetings, I shared mine. They accepted and respected me. For this reason, coming out wasn't hard for me. On the contrary, I enjoyed it a great deal! By that time, I already knew that I was not a "normal" person." I studied sociology, became a feminist, came out, slept with whom I pleased. It wasn't a big deal, nothing strange or foreign. On the contrary, I came out as bisexual with great passion.

RO: When did you first become a bisexual activist, and what caused you to get involved?

MB: After coming out as bisexual, I set out to find a bisexual group. I knew perfectly well that I wasn't a lesbian because I continued to be attracted to men, and so I wasn't interested in joining a lesbian group. By that time, I knew that every year there was a "lesbian-gay" pride march in my city, and I decided to attend. There I found a group called Caracol: Mixed Bisexual Group. They handed me a flyer with information about their meetings and I began to go to them. Even though this group didn't last long, I met Angélica Ramírez and Natalia

Anaya, who later founded another group called Sentido Bisexual (Bisexual Feeling) in 1998. I joined this group and was able to share my experiences, ideas and yearnings, and with this group I joined a march for the first time. It was an amazing experience! I felt happy and proud to say that I was bisexual.

This group dissolved in 2000. I missed it a great deal and knew, as did many others, that we needed a bi group, so three years later, together with Natalia and two other women, we founded Opción Bisexual (Bisexual Option) and I have been involved in this group ever since. It was very important thing to us that there be a space where we could discuss bisexuality, and where nobody would question our bisexuality or challenge our existence.

We meet the first Sunday of each month. We also have a website, offer workshops, discussions, meetings and get involved in political issues that we consider important to bisexuality, together with other LGTTTI (lesbian, gay, transgender, transsexual and intersex) groups.

RO: Are there other resources available to bisexuals in Mexico and in Mexico City?

MB: Unfortunately, not many. There is almost no information about bisexuality in Spanish, and what there is in English is hard to obtain. Obviously, there is the Internet, and thankfully, we know about bisexuality in other parts of the world. There are almost no groups where people get together in person. There is only Opción Bi, and there are some virtual groups online. Nor are there spaces like cafés or bars for bisexuals. Bisexuality here, like in most of the world, continues to be invisible and subject

to a great deal of prejudice.

In Opción Bi, we try to have activities about and for bisexuals (and also for those interested in the subject, even if they aren't bi. One change we have seen is that some LGTTTI events now include bisexuality, and we are sometimes invited to participate in them.

RO: What value, if any, do you see in international activism, in keeping in touch with bi activists in other countries? Do you think the movement in Mexico City was inspired/influenced by movements in other countries? Have you – to your knowledge – inspired activists in other countries?

MB: I consider international activism and contact with activists from other countries extremely important. Here in Mexico, we are most familiar with the bi movement in the USA, including the work of Fritz Klein, and your own activism. We have read some of your essays in books that we have been able to get hold of here in Mexico City.

RO: Why do you continue to participate in bi activism? What keeps you involved?

MB: Being a bisexual activist has helped me to grow as an individual, and has taught me about myself, the times in which I live, my society and the world. For me, it is very important to work toward changing and improving my society. I consider the fight for the rights of bisexuals and the rest of LGTTTI community essential, and the movement that I have chosen is that we call here sexual and gender diversity.

It certainly hasn't been easy, above all because of the prejudice and discrimination that exists against bisexuals, not only from the "heterosexual world," but also from gays and lesbians. In Opción Bi, we realize that in addition to sensitizing and educating the outside world, we first have to do the internal work with lesbians and gays. The problem is very serious, because bisexuals, along with trans folks, are the rejects among rejects, that is to say, those who suffer discrimination (lesbians and gays) discriminate



Myriam Brito, continues on next page



**Myriam Brito**, *continued from page 3*

against bis and trans folks. It is for this reason, at least here in Mexico City, that Opción Bi allies itself with transsexuals, transgender people and transvestites, and works together with them whenever possible. It seems to me that we are closer to the trans communities than to lesbian and gay ones.

And then there's the larger society. In Mexico there have been cultural changes, but not enough, our society continues to be profoundly conservative with respect to everything that has to do with sexuality, the body and gender, especially among rural populations. In the cities, people are more exposed to sexual and gender diversity, but people are still uncomfortable with this: they would prefer we didn't exist. A large part of

Mexican society is uncomfortable with our LGBTTTI diversity. There is a lot of work to be done and I want to be part of it. Besides, I have to confess that I have a great passion for activism, and I am able to combine it a bit with my work as a feminist researcher.

#### RESOURCES:

México:

Grupo Opción Bisexual [www.opcionbi.com](http://www.opcionbi.com)  
[opcionbi@yahoo.com](mailto:opcionbi@yahoo.com)

Colombia:

Sentido Bisexual [sentidobisexual@gmail.com](mailto:sentidobisexual@gmail.com)

## Election Day Whiplash

by *Ellyn Ruthstrom*

If you are a queer citizen, the day after Election Day 2008 was certainly one of both elation and consternation. "Yes, We Did!" rang out across the land as we celebrated a new hope for change in the White House. But as word spread that there were setbacks in certain states on anti-GLBT initiatives, the election high was tempered with the reality that our struggle continues regardless of who moves into 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.

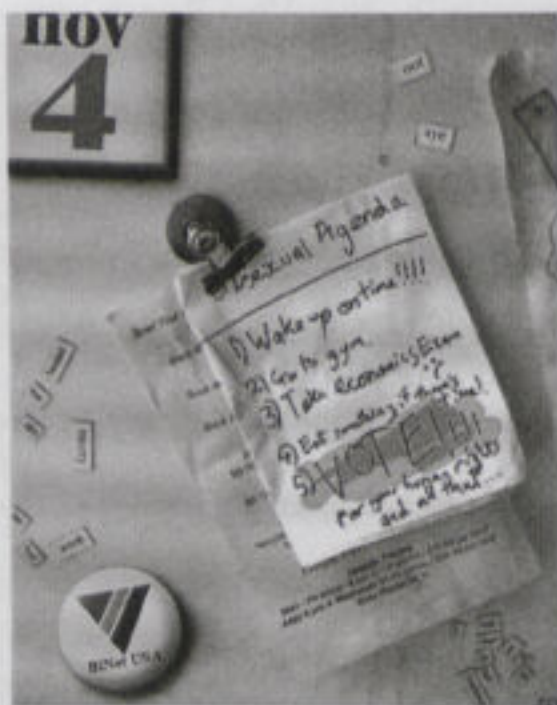
As always, you must start with the good news. Openly bisexual Rebecca Kaplan won her bid for a place on the Oakland, California City Council. Kaplan has ties to Massachusetts, as she went to MIT and back in 1991 conceived the second course on bisexuality in the U.S. (which BiWomen editor Robyn Ochs taught!) Small bi world, eh?

Jared Polis, a Democrat from Colorado, became the third openly gay member of the U.S. House of Representatives, joining Barney Frank (D-MA) and Tammy Baldwin (D-WI). Benjamin Cruz was elected as the first openly gay Senator at Large from Guam and out lesbian Kate Brown became Oregon's Secretary of State, winning 59 percent of the vote. Pacific northwesterners can be proud of also electing the first openly gay mayor in Portland, Sam Adams.

Jason Bartlett's reelection to the Connecticut House is important to note because he came out since his first election and the voters were obviously happy to return him to the State House. He is also one of very few openly gay African American legislators around the country.

John Perez became the first openly gay person of color elected to the California State Assembly, winning with about 85 percent of the vote.

In 2004, Lupe Valdez became the first woman, the first Latina, and the first out lesbian ever elected as Sheriff in Dallas County, Texas. Despite being targeted by the Republicans as a post they were determined to regain, Valdez was re-elected by her community in November.



Now for the bad news. I'm sure by now you are aware that Proposition 8 passed in California, which again made it illegal for same-sex couples to marry in that state. There will be court cases to challenge the results, but though new nuptials will be prevented, it looks like the same-sex couples that did marry may retain that status. Arizona and Florida also passed anti-marriage equality propositions, with Florida going a step farther by restricting partner recognition to unmarried straight couples as well. Arkansas voted by a 57-43 margin to ban all unmarried cohabiting couples (straight or same-sex) from adopting or serving as foster parents.

There is great sadness when those in our communities continue to see us and our families as deserving of less than equal status and protection. In analyzing the failure to vote down Proposition 8 in California, some say that there was complacency about it, an assumption that other people would get out and vote against it. From looking at the election results, 11 million Californians cast a vote in the presidential election, 62 percent for Obama. Only 10 million cast a vote on Proposition 8. If those one million voters were motivated enough to get to the polls to vote for a progressive candidate, then it was a missed opportunity to not have gotten them to also see the importance of voting on Proposition 8. It was a huge loss for California, but we can always learn from a political loss to be better prepared in the future.

To end on a high note, there was good news from my home state of Connecticut. The voters soundly rejected the idea of holding a Constitutional Convention that could challenge the court decision granting marriage equality earlier this year, and the first marriage licenses were issued on November 12th. New England is a trailblazing region on this issue, with Massachusetts and Connecticut granting state marriage rights, and Vermont and New Hampshire granting civil unions to same-sex couples. Rhode Island has been working hard on the issue and there may be some movement on it in 2009. Maine currently has a ban on same-sex marriage, but local activists are working behind the scenes to work for future change.

Social change takes time and effort. Speaking out, knocking on doors, donating, talking to neighbors and friends, voting, writing letters, calling our legislators, and taking to the streets are all part of the long process of shifting opinions in a democracy. We are the ones that make it happen. And we are the ones that will witness even more great change in our lifetimes. The sea change has already begun; let's keep it moving.

[*Ellyn is a former editor of Bi Women.*]





## Learning from BobBI

**BobBI Keppel is a long-time bi activist and BBWN member who lives in Maine. She was the subject of a homily given by Rev. Elaine Bomford at the First Unitarian Universalist Society in Burlington, VT. With BobBI and of Rev. Bomford's permission, we share Rev. Bomford's words with you:**

Twenty-one years ago this Society celebrated the first Coming Out service here in Burlington. For those of you who have been here a long time, this celebration has become part of the familiar rhythm of congregational life. For me, and perhaps for others who are new to the congregation, this is the first Coming Out service I have ever been to. So it seems to me to be an extraordinary event. The radical blessedness of this morning's service is fully in my awareness. The blessings of being who we are, in all our human diversity, and the blessedness of being together in mutual respect and appreciation, are epitomized in this gathering. How much richer, more interesting, and more beautiful life would be if all places were free of the ignorance which so often smothers the blossoming of the human spirit.

I'd like to share with you a story from my own life about "Coming Out" – it's a story I'm still celebrating because I'm still learning from it. Several summers ago, a woman who has since become my close friend, BobBI Keppel, and I sat down together because she said she had something to tell me. I already knew I liked BobBI – I liked her sparkling eyes and glorious grin. I enjoyed her humor, and the fascinating stories she told of her long life and many adventures, her commitment to the struggle for social justice, her rich knowledge of folk music and musicians, the way she played the autoharp and sang in a warbly true voice. I liked the way she rolled her eyes when some unfortunate soul said something off the wall. I appreciated the way she really listened, and the way she didn't seem at all afraid to speak up.

But when we sat down for the conversation she had requested we have together, she was hesitant to speak. Her eyes sparkled, not with characteristic mischief, but with tears.

"I want to tell you something, and I hope you will still want to be my friend after I've told you," she said. I was already well on the way to opening my heart to her as a dear friend. I couldn't imagine what might give her such qualms. But I just said "OK – what is it?"

She told me about her life as a wife and mother, and how, 25 years ago, when she was about the age I am now, she realized she is bisexual.

I sighed with relief, because for me, it was a no-brainer. "Of course I still care for you!" I

said. "It doesn't matter to me at all! I like you for who you are – whether you are straight, or lesbian, or bi – it doesn't make any difference to me."

"Ah – but it DOES make a difference to me," she said. "Because being bi is an essential part of who I am."

She didn't want me to care about her regardless of her sexual identity. She wanted me to care about her as a person with the sexual identity of being bisexual. When she said this, a light went on for me. I was humbled, because I realized how insensitive my way of being "accepting" had been before she opened my eyes. It was as if my ability to appreciate the different colors of flowers in a garden had been heightened. Of course it matters whether the flowers are golden, or delicate pink, deep red, vivid orange. Of course it matters whether a person is bisexual, lesbian, gay, transgender, queer or straight. And further, my friend opened my eyes to the fact that there are as many shades of sexuality as there are individuals – each one of us is unique. Because her essential nature as a bisexual woman matters, and she made me see that, my capacity to appreciate beauty in a multitude of expressions has been enhanced.

She has taught me much since that conversation when she "came out" to me and I "came out" of my bland and easy acceptance of sexual diversity. Some of what I have learned has been about what it means to be, as she puts it, a bi woman who is "gray-haired and above suspicion." Most of what I have learned through our friendship is what it means to be fully human – like all true friendships, we discover who we are as we see ourselves reflected back in each other's eyes – reflected back a little better than we are, often, so we have room to grow in spirit.

But I will never forget how her eyes looked when she first disclosed her bisexuality, or the passion in her voice when she said, "Oh Yes, it DOES matter." She did not want mere acceptance. She wanted celebration – and my life has been made richer because of her insistence.

As we observe "Coming Out" Sunday today, I find myself wondering about the difference between acceptance and celebration as it plays out in the life of this congregation. Does this service signify that it doesn't matter what your sexual orientation is, you are loved and respected here? This is an important and healthy affirmation, I believe. Too often in wider society we are confronted with situations where sexual identity should NOT matter, but it does. It shouldn't matter when it comes to weighing the essential worth and dignity of a person; this is and should be a "no-brainer." We stand together as one people when we struggle against oppression. This Society is a beacon of hope and solidarity in the struggle for justice and equality.

### *Kids, continued from page 1*

Yet, when it comes to kids, my internal homophobia rears its ugly head. My goddaughters' mother doesn't know I'm bisexual (although I think most of my extended family could guess that I'm not the straightest stick on the tree if they gave it a little thought). I haven't come out to her, even though she's one of the most important women in my life, because I have a nagging fear that she wouldn't trust me with her daughters if she knew. Although I worked with kids as part of my job for six years, I was never out to them. I wasn't afraid of rejection from them; in fact, we worked very hard to create a space where homophobia of any type was not tolerated. Yet, that wasn't enough to wash away my own internal homophobia. I couldn't bear the thought of parents taking their daughters out of the program if they knew I was bisexual.

When I was first coming out, I read *Free Your Mind* by Ellen Bass and Kate Kaufman, paying special attention to the chapters about working with kids. Although I was on track for the most part – I didn't allow homophobic jokes, didn't shy away from the subject of sexual orientation, proactively created a GLBTQ safe space – I didn't rise to the challenge of one of the most important parts of creating a safe space for GLBTQ youth.

### *Kids, continued on page 9*

However, within the safety of the loving relationships and mutual respect which characterize this congregation, we may venture to do more than accept one another. There are beautifully diverse ways of being and qualities of energy that are grounded in our sexual natures. How do we acknowledge that sexual orientation does matter, and should matter? How might we more fully appreciate all the colors in the beautiful garden that grows when the human spirit is encouraged to blossom?

May we look to each other for the answers, as we each come out, and come into our own. I pray each one of us will be blessed with courage gained from the sure and certain knowledge that we are loved, this day and always. AMEN

*[Elaine Bomford is a UU minister who has served congregations in NH, MA, and presently, Burlington, VT. She's also a singer and conductor, mother, bird lover, gardener, and on occasion rescues senior canines.]*



## What I Did, continued from p. 1

ship to the organized bi community – that existing in a state in which your personal life is suffocated by unresolved issues can make it impossible to stay engaged with formal organizations, networks, and activism that center around sexuality and relationships. But that doesn't mean that people aren't actively contributing to sexual and gender justice and liberation in their own ways during these stages of life.

Becoming a parent and dealing with life's challenges has definitely broadened my conception of activism and of my own identity. You have a new role in your community that brings you into contact with schools, other parents, youth organizations, and the healthcare system. You have new perspectives and priorities. Most of all, you have a chance to shape a new person who will grow up to live life on their own terms – as a friend, a lover, a partner, a neighbor, a consumer, a voter, a leader. The saying goes, "We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children." In the same way, I knew instinctively when I had my daughter that, like all human beings, she was meant to contribute important things to the world; this beautiful gift was on loan to me for a limited time, so I'd better do the best I could!

I've taught her about pride in your own identity and respect and appreciation for others. This applies to race and religion, which are easy concepts for her to understand, as well as to gender expression and sexual orientation. I happen to have a lot of transgender and gender-queer people in my life, and my circle is pretty mixed in terms of people with same- or opposite-sex partners, or both. I normalize this for her in the language I use and the openness I model. I also show her that I value and belong to queer communities as well as mainstream ones: in the music we listen to, the performances we see, the events we go to. I play Ani DiFranco along with Lila Downs. We see Zili Misik at the Keshet Purim Party, and Mariachi Veritas at the Día de los Muertos Fiesta. The Boston Pride parade is an annual event we go to just like the Jamaica Plain World's Fair. I don't have to accept segregation or feel ghettoized in one community or the other. This is a way I pass on my values on without preaching; the same way I demonstrate any other value, such as environmentalism, in that recycling and composting are just things we do automatically in our house.

Of course, I've also taught my daughter about standing up for ourselves and our rights. I don't gloss over the reality that

people have conflicting ideas and beliefs. That doesn't mean we demonize others; but it does mean we have to speak up for ourselves. I show and explain to her all the ways we have power in our lives: who I vote for and vote against, what I buy and don't buy, what the newspaper says and doesn't say and how we can write letters to the editor – or better yet, write our own articles for alternative media! These decisions are about supporting those who share our values, or who at least respect our right to self-determination, including our love lives. She tagged along with me to the State House and helped lobby legislators on economic justice issues during the budget-cutting days of the Romney administration. She learned to march and chant in the big anti-war protests of 2003, and the big immigrant rights rallies of 2006. (This one backfired on me, though – one day at summer camp on a field trip to the zoo, the sight of the animals caged up prompted her to start marching and shouting protest slogans like "El pueblo unido jamás será vencido!") She saw me call and email my legislators thanking them for their support of same-sex marriage rights over the last several years, and understands that I believe in this as a part of human rights for everyone, and also because I want these rights to be there for me if I ever need them. (Not that I have any plans to ever go there again with anyone of any gender at this point, though!)

As she gets older, there are more and more ways I can affirm her right to develop into her full self – whatever her orientation ends up being – and celebrate all the possibilities ahead of her. It's a challenge that's both daunting and exciting. One way to rise to the challenge that many parents forget about is to devote energy to developing and healing ourselves. Being a parent pushes you to get to know yourself, grow as a person, and learn to use your voice in ways that you probably would have avoided if there weren't someone else counting on you to be a positive role model and guide to young people. And though I would have often loved to have avoided it, it is helpful to make the time, when needed, to reflect on and process the baggage that gets in the way of healthy sexuality and relationships in your own life. I have a feeling that very few of us have not been affected by personal trauma, homophobia and biphobia, or rigid gender socialization.

Another way to support our children is to get involved in the schools. My daughter has several classmates from two-mom families, one of which includes her first-grade teacher. I very much enjoyed volunteering in her classroom that year, and letting her

know that I accept and appreciate her and her family. Our School Parent Council formed a "Climate Committee" to address issues of respect and bullying, particularly around homophobia, and I attend the meetings when I can and suggest resources. I also volunteer in other ways and am active in the school community in general, because like all parents, I'm much more than just my sexual identity.

Finally, I'm trying to be more open and forthcoming with my daughter about sexuality in general than my parents were with me. In particular, her generation – even more than mine – needs to be mentored on media literacy, especially the girls! Interestingly, watching *Ugly Betty* together has prompted great conversations between us. I definitely don't remember my mom explaining contraception to me when I was nine – or ever! I still struggle for the language to talk about sex in a non-heterosexist way, but matter-of-fact media representations of diverse sexualities are a big help. Kids are amazingly perceptive – my daughter picked up immediately on the age-old complaint of queer media critics: even if network TV shows have sympathetic gay/bi characters, they never get to show affection or attraction with their same-sex partners in ways comparable to the straight characters. When the fashion-conscious character Marc tried to pass off his boyfriend as a "friend" due to embarrassment about being seen with a non-model, she piped up "I think he's just a friend too, because they don't kiss or go to bed like Betty and her boyfriend." So I explained to her how I thought they were meant to be boyfriends on the show, but because some people don't think men should be with men or women with women, most TV shows don't show how two men in a relationship actually treat each other, and added that I wished they did.

And with that, I conclude my report on "What I did on my ten-year vacation." For me, motherhood IS activism. So bi motherhood = bi activism. Hey, I think now I know what T-Shirt I'm wearing to the Pride parade this year! See you there!

*Maria Christina is a Jamaica Plain mother, maternal-child community health worker, researcher and onetime BRC Board member (1996-1999). She has become contrary in her old age (of 31) and now tends more towards the "I Refuse To Label Myself!" camp, but she will always feel at home in the bi community. Look for her at Pride in her "I can't even label my leftovers, let alone my sexuality" T-shirt.*



# My Journey to Momhood

by Carla Imperial

I'm standing in a field. Alone. In the distance I see the ocean, and its vastness makes me feel empty.

I came here to search my soul, to dig deep and uncover truths that have been embedded in layers of fear. I am hoping that somewhere beneath the muck I'll find some peace in what I am about to embark upon.

Parenthood.

I wish I could claim youth or a failed condom that got me into this predicament. On the contrary, I'm here by very thoughtful and deliberate actions. When two women decide to have a baby together, every step is considered and hashed and rehashed. Who will carry the baby? Who will be the sperm donor? How will we inseminate? No, there is nothing unintentional about what is happening. And this isn't about getting cold feet before the bambino arrives. Or about second thoughts. Truth is, I didn't want to have a baby in the first place.

When we got married ten years ago, I was in a different space. I was thirty-five and it seemed like having kids was the logical next step. But then shit happened. Major life blows. Relationship challenges. Loss of a beloved parent. Before I knew it, I was forty and life was whizzing by. Grab on, a voice said. So I did. And suddenly I was in a gloriously self-indulgent place. My relationship was healthy, I was finally pursuing my dreams, and I was exactly where I wanted to be. Wouldn't you know it, that's when she brings up the kid thing again. And wasn't it a shock to her ears and a crushing blow to her heart to hear that I no longer wanted to be a parent.

I tried. I really tried to change my mind. I spent countless hours trying to embrace the idea. But each time I ended up with the same mindset. Scared shitless. How do two people who love each other deeply, one who wants a child desperately and one who is undeniably certain that she doesn't, resolve this impasse? Tears. Hard talks. Ultimatums. Lots of visits to the ocean. During this particular visit, I explore all of the reasons that I don't want children, once again. The permanent responsibility. The loss of freedom. The financial burden. Feeling old. Being the non-biological mom. An intense ache that my mother won't be around to be a grandparent. And suddenly the answer comes to me.

Faith.

And with faith, I am able to go one step towards my partner. We agree to take everything one step at a time. Let fate decide if we'll be parents. Let things fall into place as they will. It was clear who would carry the child. I've never had that maternal yearning. When we find an anonymous Filipino donor whose baby picture looks just like me, it's clearly a sign. When my wife gets pregnant on her first try, on the outside, I am thrilled for us.

On the inside, I am panicking.

She's pregnant.

Hurray for her.

Fuck me.

I remember to breathe. I remember about faith. I remember how happy my wife is. I take baby steps to let go of the fears, one by one. At the first ultrasound, I cry tears of joy. The first heartbeat we hear, my own heart expands. My wife is the glowing, perfect pregnant woman. All the while, she has been gentle and gracious with me. Her gratitude toward my going on this journey is apparent. As we watch her belly grow, I am slowly falling in love with what's inside. The day before our due date, I see my mother's reflection in the mirror as I sit in our empty nursery. And then comes the day. January 16, 2008. Our daughter is here. By god, she looks like me.

There are changes of the heart. Then there are transformations of the heart. In the short ten months that my daughter has been on this earth, I have been taught more patience and grace than throughout my entire lifetime. She is miraculously a mix of my partner and me, and I have no idea how we did that. And sure enough, my capacity to love unconditionally was under all that dirt, and although the dust settles every once in awhile with old fears and longings, I have zero regrets. None.

I'm standing in a field. My arms are open wide, and my daughter, who has just learned to walk, is running toward me. As I scoop her up in my arms and feel her soft cheek on mine, I cannot imagine feeling more complete.

[Carla is a bi Filipina writer, living in Jamaica Plain, MA with her partner of 14 years, Megan, and their 10-month old daughter, Kai.]



## Brunch Coordinator Invites You to Host

BBWN potluck brunches are a great way to meet other bi women in the Boston area. We try to hold a brunch in a member's home each month so that people can relax and share food and experiences in a safe space. Deb Morley is the brunch coordinator, so please contact her at debmo345@gmail.com if you are interested in hosting a brunch. And check out the calendar on pages 11-12 for activities coming up this fall. Hope you can join us.

## Do You Know Web Design?

We're looking for someone to get biwomen-boston.org, our new website, up and running. If you are interested, please contact Robyn: biwomeneditor@gmail.com. It's the perfect volunteer job, as you can do it from home, in your pajamas, or even in your birthday suit.



## Baby Mama

by Rosemary Van Deuren

I was nineteen when my girlfriend Claire got pregnant. I demanded to know who the father was, since it clearly was not me. Nothing she said at that point would've surprised me, although the man in question did turn out to be the one most likely. And ironically, I had been concerned that my girlfriend was cheating on me – with that man's female friend.

Claire had done an impeccable job of convincing me that she was a lesbian. Not that it mattered to me – I didn't care if she was gay, or bi, or just 'special.' And after we broke up, I used to wonder why she went so far out of her way to convince me of her rampant lesbianism, and why she outright lied about her past male lovers. I have since realized that she wasn't trying to convince me she was gay, she was trying to convince herself. And at ten years her junior, I was

little and green, and ripe to be duped in almost every way. For I was the only girlfriend Claire had ever had, and my youth was the chief allure I held for her.

At nineteen, I had no interest in having a child. But I would've stayed with Claire if she'd asked me to; something that fortunately never came to pass. Our May-December relationship had been a train-wreck of misery, and its tumultuous end mirrored this in both messiness and drama. I lost ten pounds in ten days, and my empathetic gem of a bookstore manager put me to work stocking the back room so I could sob all the way through my shifts. Claire came raging into the bookstore and tried to attack me, but only once, because at that point mall security banned her from my workplace.

I correctly predicted the inevitable separation of Claire and her baby's father, who split before the child was even two. I also correctly predicted that this was inconsequential to Claire. She had gotten

what she wanted, and the means by which this came to be just didn't mean much. Claire had been planning this unplanned affair, a secret kept not only from me, but also from her soon-to-be baby daddy. He no doubt noticed that she had shaved her armpits in preparation for their 'spontaneous' interlude. But what he didn't know was that six weeks prior, she had also stopped taking the birth control pills she used to regulate her endometriosis.

But years before that, many years before I entered her life at all, Claire had been briefly, and unhappily, married to her high school sweetheart. This man had strong-armed her into an abortion when she was nineteen, just the age I was then, and it was decision she'd always regretted. This time she became pregnant at twenty-nine, an age where a woman's susceptibility to childbearing hormones is especially high; although I wouldn't learn that until I became twenty-nine myself. →

## REVIEW: Two Sexy, Soulful Books by Gina Ogden

by Julie Ebin

Many books on sexuality and desire seem to zoom in on the physical how-to or on specific worlds – sex tips, aspects of kink, tantra, and reproductive health, to name some specifics. Few, if any, focus on how women specifically make meaning of sexuality and desire, and how they are intertwined with our lives beyond the bedroom. Gina Ogden's recent books, *The Return of Desire* and *The Heart and Soul of Sex*, are a refresh-

ing exception.

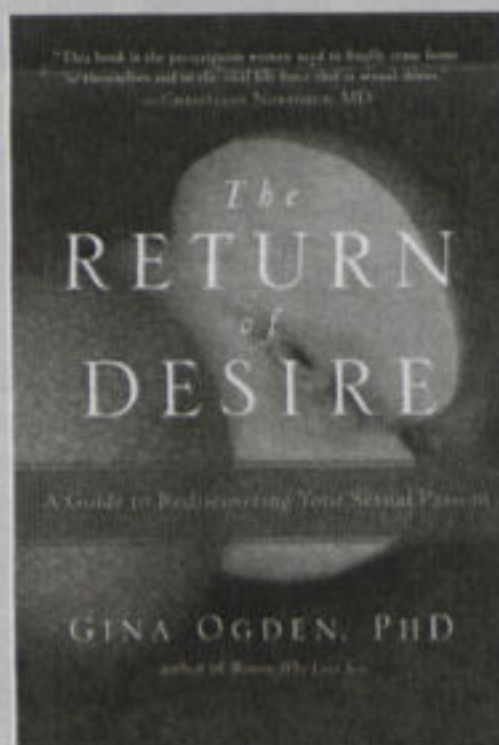
Both books draw on a unique model Gina developed, called the ISIS circle, which draws from her research on the connections between sexuality and spirituality, her many years of practice as a sex therapist, and her study of shamanism. The model uses multiple entry points into exploring sexuality, rather than a how-to formula. The books are written in a conversational style that invites in, not at all clinical or medical in tone. They are easily accessible while still spelling out both concepts and practical exercises.

In *The Heart and Soul of Sex*, Gina first sets the stage with a review of books and popular messages related to women's sexuality. Next she discusses her nearly 4000-person online survey on women's sexuality, including the wealth of responses to the survey that showed the relationship between sexuality and spirituality. Although I enjoyed reading the background and survey responses (especially the amazing quotes from the survey responses), I was also a bit impatient to get to the good stuff – how was this book going to help me personally? Finally, in the third part of the book, she discusses the ISIS circle model in detail, including a theoretical framework, and yes, reflective questions, suggested activities, and meditations that I could do

on my journey.

In the book Gina lays out the ISIS circle, which describes four quadrant aspects of sexuality: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Gina invites us to explore how we relate to each of these aspects, and how they interplay within us as well. Through any or each of these four elements, she explains, we may journey to a sense of sexual connection with ourselves, a partner, or the broader universe. This book spoke to me because it went beyond looking at just one aspect of sexuality (like a lover focused only on certain key areas!), and instead took a holistic approach. The book is also egalitarian about the gender of the reader's partner(s), and makes no assumptions.

*The Return of Desire* also uses the ISIS circle to help us understand our sexual desires, or what gets in their way. The book is a transformative starting point for examining our sexual selves in the context of our whole lives, including the context of Western society. For example, Gina writes how one client's solo sexual experience changed the rest of her life, "[S]he's now less prone to judging others or trying to control them. Having so fully experienced that most intimate of sexual partnerships – with her- →





In the months after we broke up, I'd see Claire haughtily pass by my bookstore window, not looking over but knowing that I was watching her. Amidst my sadness and anger, there was a wave of relief, and not only for myself. As badly as she'd treated me, and as much as she had preyed on and manipulated my youth and inexperience, I remembered how sad she had been when she spoke of the teenage abortion she'd never wanted to have. Had been forced to have. So as I watched Claire walk by, day after day, and her hair growing longer and her body becoming – pregnant – I thought, "She'll have the baby she always wanted. Good for her."

Before giving up my key to Claire's apartment, I tearfully rifled through the photo boxes we'd filled, lamenting all the trips and memories chronicled there, and stealing some of my favorite pictures of her, including some of the nudes she'd never let me see because she thought they were

'unflattering.' By this time, the framed boudoir nudes of me that she used to keep next to her bed were turned facedown and shoved in drawers, and I wondered what would become of them once she entered motherhood. Would she bury them in a keepsake box, on a bed of my old love letters? Or would she just throw them away? Would this child of hers ever go snooping through his mother's things, and discover that she'd had a teenage lover – who did try to love her – at the time he was conceived? Or would he go through his life thinking his mother was straight?

As is typical of nineteen year olds, I overestimated my importance in a love triangle that left me negated once it had created a human life. Which was exactly as it should've been. For this child – Claire's child – was at the mercy of all three of us, and it was his needs that were most important. But my desire then to leave some sort of permanence in Claire's iconology

was understandable too; she had been a much more singular, detrimental force in my development than I had ever been in hers. And as a grown woman now, considering children myself, I no longer think about or even want any sort of presence in Claire's life. When I think of her now, I think of the son she is raising, who turns eleven this month. And more than anything else, I hope she is a good mother to the child she always wanted.

[Rosemary lives in Michigan, and has worked as a freelance illustrator, sculptor and painter. She is currently pursuing a career in writing, and has just finished her first novel and her first poetry collection. More on her accomplishments can be found on her website: [www.rosemaryvandeuren.com](http://www.rosemaryvandeuren.com).]

#### Review continued from previous page

self – she says she's able to reach out more confidently and compassionately into the world around her. Gina leads the reader through various challenges to desire and how to address them, from giving birth and raising children, to gender differences, abuse and trauma, and losing oneself in a partner. She outlines other considerations relating to desire as well, such as polyamory, same-sex attraction, and comfort with oneself. The book is organized in such a way that you can skip around and pick and choose the topics that are most relevant to you.

While much of *The Return of Desire* seems to be written with female-male relationships in mind, Gina frequently reminds us that most of the same principals apply to same-sex relationships, and includes a chapter on "Living Curly in a Straight Culture." This chapter not only gets into the usual Kinsey framework but describes the impact on your love life of questioning your sexuality, the myth of lesbian bed death, and most importantly, quotations and descriptions of the power and amazing joy that being lesbian and separately, being bisexual can bring. She describes one bi woman's experience. "For her, this sexual blending of female and male was more than the physical pleasure, or the novelty, or the thrill of bending rules. It was a true wrinkle in time – as if she had stepped into a realm beyond her knowing. And the experience transformed her life." Much of the book also includes information and exercises relevant to women who are single.

I highly recommend both books for anyone who is interested in a new approach to understanding and improving their sense of sexual connection. Happy reading!

[Julie is a bi poet, dancer, and health advocate living in Cambridge, MA. Her poetry has appeared in *Bi Women*, *Getting Bi*, and *The Fence*.]

#### Kids, continued from page 5

I didn't come out and give them the opportunity to see a successful, happy, adult bisexual woman.

I realize that I'm not being fair to the kids I worked with, or their parents, or my goddaughters' mother. I don't have a shred of evidence that the adults in these kids' lives would cut me out if they knew I was bisexual. In fact, I have evidence to the contrary: the parents I worked with expressed nothing but support of our efforts to build a GLBTQ safe space, and the mother of my goddaughters once said that she "wouldn't mind" if her daughters ended up being gay. Still, my fear remains strong. Perhaps it comes from awareness of the stereotypes and assumptions that people attach to the word "bisexual," and my weariness to be an ever-present "educator" about "real" bisexuality. Perhaps it comes from my inkling, not entirely unfounded, that being gay is OK but being bi is not. (When I was a child, an important adult in my life told me, "There is nothing wrong with being gay, but those bisexual people will sleep with anyone." Perhaps that has something to do with my self-imposed celibacy). Perhaps it comes from watching too many TV specials in the nineties about teachers who were fired because of their sexual orientation. Perhaps it comes from reading too many homophobic letters from adults in response to anything that exposes kids to the reality of various sexual orientations.

Still, I like to dress my fear up with nobler causes. My mother, a public health nurse, tells me that all it takes is one adult who cares about a child to give that child a chance at success. I've extrapolated from that that the more caring adults a child has in her life, the better. I've had the opportunity to be a caring adult in the lives of many extraordinary girls. And although my guilt over remaining closeted with them is strong, my fear that I'd be cut out of their lives is stronger. It's unfair that we live in a world where sexual minorities are viewed with fear and suspicion, but it would be more unfair to deprive a child of an adult who cares about her. I justify my closeted state in this way.

Last week, I went out to lunch with a girl I used to work with who has now grown into a confident, brave young woman (they have

*Closet*, continued on page 10



# The Tupperware Lady

by Fennel

It was the Tupperware lady who got me thinking about the role of women as wives and mothers in our North American culture. About five years ago, I invited one of these "ladies" over to help organize my kitchen. I told her I was single and described the kinds of things I needed to organize, to cook and store (beans, chocolate chips, and the like). This woman couldn't listen and couldn't break out of her woman as mother and wife mindset. Whenever I mentioned my single status, she blithely ignored it and went on to describe which containers I would use to pack lunch for the kids, and which I'd use to make meals for my family. Well, I was a family of one. The experience left me feeling left out of our culture.

Another time I felt left out was in a women's spirituality group I belonged to for many years. There were about ten of us, and we all started out single. Fast forward a few years, and every woman married and had children except me and one other woman. Eventually, being in that group became too painful, and I left. I decided to seek spirituality elsewhere in place that felt more inclusive of a range of different choices. Not having children never felt like a decisive choice to me. It was more a blend of fertility issues, timing, ambivalence, and not having the right partner at the right time. Also, on the light side, I once told my mother, "I think I'd like kind of a quiet life." And she said, "Then don't have children!"

Yet children have a big role in my life. I teach kids, am an aunt to four boys, a Big Sister, and I have an active role in my friend's kids' lives.

I think women who don't have kids are left out in a certain way and are forced to forge their own path through the proverbial Robert Frost woods!

I once had a spiritual experience at a retreat center. I connected with this young girl, and she with me. We were at a bohemian Shabbat Service. I had this transcendent experience, as if I were getting to feel what it would be like if she were my child. It brought tears to my eyes, and I took many walks pondering whether I could handle being a mother. I was afraid that I could not, and therefore would be doing a disservice to a child. I think that is why I choose to be a Big Sister. I know what I can commit and what my limits are. This way, no one is disappointed.

The book that inspired me to write this article is Betsy Israel's *Bachelor Girl: The Secret History of Single Women in the Twentieth Century*. It is primarily, as the title suggests, a book about single life, but I pressed on to see what she might want to say about children.

She writes, "Older single women are, in the span of one afternoon and three conversations, first cool pioneers figuring out how to live singly, or make communities, and have children, or else they are unbelievably pathetic losers. People who waited. People who were deluded by feminism. People who will have nasty experiences with Pergonal and Clomid. And depending on the circumstance – the speaker – 'old' can occur at 30 or 35 or 40, 50, or 27." (p.246)

One night last year I was visiting my best friend from college, who had just adopted a baby from Russia. At 2 a.m., in their living room on the pullout couch, I had an existential crisis. A dark night of the soul came over me and I was awash with questions: What had I done with my life? Was this a huge mistake not having children? What had I been thinking and could I never go back? Though this feeling faded with the morning sunrise, uneasiness about my life and my choices remains.

The feelings are not simple: they are convoluted and perhaps mysterious. I'm blessed with the richness that children in my life bring. And when I'm stressed out in the supermarket and someone's kid is screaming, I feel bad for the kid and the mother, but sometimes when I feel overwhelmed enough with life already, I'm glad that's not me. People always say you feel different when it's your kid. Sadly, I may never know.

Someday, I hope to become a stepmother, but in the meantime, being a good friend to my friend's kids, my students, and my Little Sister seem enough for now.


*[Fennel is a long-time member of BBWN who has lived in the Boston area since 1990.]*

Closet, continued from page 9

the habit of doing that). Without preamble, she told me how difficult it was for her and her girlfriend to be the only out lesbians at her school. Although her stories "outed" her to me, it was so clear that it was not a calculated decision on her part, that she wanted to share what was happening in her life with me, and being an out lesbian in high school was part of that. There was no dramatic, "Oh, and I'm

gay," just the thread of that reality in every story she told. I felt affirmed that, even though I hadn't been out to her when we worked together, she still knew being out with me was safe. And in the course of the conversation, I shared with her my own experiences of coming out. I know that this is also the choice I would make if my goddaughters ever came out to me or asked me about my sexual orientation outright. In the meantime, I'm working hard to foster a relationship where they understand that my love for them is unconditional, and I'm staying aware that there may come a time when coming out to them is the only ethical thing to do. Although the closet door is still closed, I refuse to lock it.

*[Lacey, 27, lives on the shores of Lake Superior and is a freelance editor and writer. In her free time, she likes making mix CDs, devouring books, cuddling her kitties, and pondering God.]*



**BECAUSE '09 Conference**  
Bisexual Empowerment Conference  
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PO Box 18143  
Minneapolis, MN 55418  
tcbop1@yahoo.com  
www.becauseconference.org  
APRIL 17-19, 2009

Bi Women • P.O. Box 301727, Jamaica Plain MA 02130

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## CALENDAR *continued from page 12*

this remarkable man who led a movement of progressive, peaceful women and men that has brought us to this incredible moment in history.

Thursday, Jan. 22, 6:30-8:00 pm, Boundless presents Perfecting the Craft of Women's Health: New Provider Party. Stop by Fenway Community Health at 7 Haviland Street and meet some of the new women's health team. Have some dinner, try for some great door prizes, build your cup-size cupcake (come on, who wouldn't want to do that?!), decorate a speculum (ditto!), and more! Contact Gillian for more info at [gconolly@fenwayhealth.org](mailto:gconolly@fenwayhealth.org) or 617-927-6028.

Sunday, Jan. 25, BBWN Potluck Brunch, 12-4 p.m. at Fennel's in Watertown Square. This will be a Poetry Brunch so bring a poem you love to share and read. In order to achieve a diverse mix of food, please bring one of the following and let Fennel know when you RSVP: drinks, salads (fruit and green), entrees, desserts. For those interested, if it's nice outside we can also take a walk. Fennel is lucky to live right across the street from the Charles River Bike Path. Email [resourcegoddess@comcast.net](mailto:resourcegoddess@comcast.net) (preferred) for RSVPs & directions, or call 617-875-9082.

### February

Wednesday, Feb. 4, 7 p.m. Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS). (See Dec. 18th)

Friday, Feb. 6, National Wear Red Day. Help raise awareness about the impact of heart disease on women by wearing red today. Check out [goredforwomen.org](http://goredforwomen.org) for more info.

Monday, Feb. 9, 7 p.m. Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. (See Dec. 8th)

Tuesday, Feb. 10, 7-9 p.m. BRC Board Meeting. (See Dec. 9th)

Friday, Feb. 13, 7:30 p.m. Mouthful: An Open Mic for Open Minds, Center for New Words, 7 Temple Street, Cambridge. (See Jan. 9th)

Saturday, Feb. 14th, 6:30-10:30pm. BIG MassEquality event: GAYLA (the political party everyone can agree on) at the Roxy! [www.massequality.org](http://www.massequality.org) for details.

Thursday, Feb. 19, 7 p.m. Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS). (See Dec. 18th)

Saturday, Feb. 21, 11:30 a.m. Saturday Bi Brunch. (See Dec. 20th)

Sunday, Feb. 22, BBWN Potluck Brunch, noon at Jen's in Cambridge. Please bring a potluck dish or drinks to share. You can contact Jen at [jbonardi@hotmail.com](mailto:jbonardi@hotmail.com) or 617-767-1981 for directions, and to let her know you are coming.

### On the horizon:

January 28-February 1, 2009: Creating Change in Denver, CO. There will be a bi caucus and a bi dinner, and some bi content in the program. For more information: [creatingchange.org](http://creatingchange.org).

April 17-19: The 15th BECAUSE (Bisexual Empowerment Conference: A Uniting, Supportive Experience) will be held at the Minneapolis campus of the University of Minnesota. Workshop proposals due January 2. For more info: [www.becauseconference.org](http://www.becauseconference.org).

### Tell Us All About It...

Do you have events that you want to make sure get publicized in BiWomen? Drop an email to the Calendar Editor, Ellyn Ruthstrom, at [nellythrustmor@comcast.net](mailto:nellythrustmor@comcast.net) by the deadline below to be included in our quarterly calendar. If you miss the print deadline, don't fret, send along the info and request that it be sent out by email to local bi women's groups.

Feb. 10: March / April / May  
May 10: June / July / August  
Aug. 10: September / October / November  
Nov. 10: Dec. / Jan. / Feb.

## Bi Women wants you!!!



### SUBSCRIPTION RATE

for Bi Women  
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\_\_\_ \$0-\$20 (pay what you can)  
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BBWN, P.O. BOX 301727, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130



## The "Bi Office"

is the Bisexual Resource Center, located at 29 Stanhope Street, behind Club Cafe. For info call 617-424-9595.

### Ongoing Events

#### Last Fridays:

**Bi Women's Rap.** 7:30-9:00 p.m. at the Cambridge Women's Center, 46 Pleasant St., Cambridge. For info and discussion topics call 617-354-8807.

#### 2nd Mondays:

**Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** Email kate.e.flynn@gmail.com for more info.

#### 1st Wednesdays, 3rd Thursdays:

**BLISS: Biseuxal Support & Social Group,** 7-9 p.m. The group meets at the Bisexual Resource Center at 29 Stanhope St. in Boston. Call 617-424-9595 for info.

#### 3rd Saturdays:

**Biversity Brunch,** 11:30 a.m. at Johnny D's, Davis Square, Somerville.

**Sign up for our new email list! Send an email to: biwomenboston-subscribe@yahoogroups.com**



# CALENDAR

## December

Monday, Dec. 8, 7 p.m. Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. A peer-led support group for women in a straight marriage/relationship struggling with sexual orientation or coming out. If interested in attending, contact kate.e.flynn@gmail.com. Meets 2nd Monday of each month.

Tuesday, Dec. 9, 7-9 p.m. Bisexual Resource Center Board Meeting. All bi and bi-friendly community members welcome to attend. This is the board's annual meeting to look back at what we've accomplished in 2008 and look ahead to a new year. We will be voting on board members for 2009. If you are interested in learning more about the BRC or about becoming a board member, contact the current board president, Ellyn Ruthstrom at nellythrustmor@comcast.net for more info. At the Boston Living Center, 29 Stanhope St. near Back Bay station on the Orange Line.

Friday, Dec. 12, 8 p.m. The Slutcracker: A Burlesque. Somerville Theatre, 55 Davis Square, Somerville. "With a vastly talented cast including some of Boston's best performance artists, an enviable creative team, and a story that'll make a person, laugh, cheer, shiver, groan, and maybe even moan (after the show, at least...), This season's most sexy-freaky holiday zeitgeist spectacular!" Also on Dec. 13 at 8:00 pm and Dec. 14 at 2:00 pm (including a Q&A with cast and director). Tickets: \$16 in advance, \$21 at door.

Sunday, Dec. 14, doors open 9 p.m., show 9:30. TraniWreck: Wreckage at The Milky Way, 405 Centre Street in Hyde Square, Jamaica Plain. Cover: \$8 ages: 21+. TraniWreck has spawned "Wreckage: the contest show" that is also a contest with 'amateur' performers and celebrity judges. Performers compete for \$200 in cash. Wreckage will mix performances by the TraniWreck crew and other non-competing performers and special guests with numbers by the competitors and also witty remarks (à la Gong Show and American Idol) from the celebrity judges.

Thursday, Dec. 18, 7 p.m. Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS). Meets on the 1st Wednesday and 3rd Thursday of each month at the Boston Living Center, 29 Stanhope Street, Boston. All bi and bi-friendly people of all genders and orientations are welcome

to attend. 1st Wednesday meetings are peer facilitated discussion groups, sometimes with a pre-selected topic or presenter. 3rd Thursday meetings are 7-8 p.m. check-ins, discussion, and announcements followed by social time at a nearby restaurant. Only want to socialize? Meet the group at or shortly after 8 p.m. in the lobby of the Boston Living Center.

Saturday, Dec. 20, 11:30 am. Biversity Brunch (a mixed gender bi group). Always the 3rd Saturday of the month at Johnny D's on Holland St. in Davis Sq., Somerville. The Red Line's Davis stop is just across the street.

Sunday, Dec. 21, 3-6 pm, Keshet's BIG Hanukkah Party! Temple Ohabei Shalom, 1187 Beacon St., Brookline. Fried food, dreidels, and sing-alongs for the whole family. RSVP by Thursday, Dec. 17 to Elyssa at elyssa@keshetonline.org or 617.524.9227. Keshet works for the full inclusion of GLBT Jews in Jewish life. www.keshetonline.org

## January 2009!!

Wednesday, Jan. 7, 7-8:45 p.m. Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS). (see Dec. 18th)

Friday, Jan. 9, 7:30 p.m. Mouthful: An Open Mic for Open Minds, Center for New Words, 7 Temple Street, Cambridge. Meets every second Friday of the month. Come to read or come to listen: the goal is to build a community of writers and readers that supports women and their allies. \$5 donation requested.

Monday, Jan. 12, 7 p.m. Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. (See Dec. 8th)

Tuesday, Jan. 13, 7-9 p.m. BRC Board Meeting. (See Dec. 9th)

Thursday, Jan. 15, 7 p.m. Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS). (See Dec. 18th)

Saturday, Jan. 17, 11:30 a.m. Saturday Bi Brunch. (See Dec. 20th)

Monday, Jan. 19, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Holiday. If Dr. King had lived, he would have turned 80 this year. One day before the inauguration of the nation's first African-American president, this holiday will be particularly meaningful. Participate in local celebrations of

**CALENDAR** continues on page 11



## Why I Am a Bi Ally

by Cathy Renna

One of the most interesting parts of being an ally—for me at least—is the reaction of other people. “I had no idea you were [fill in the blank]” has been said to me so many times I cannot count. I consider it a compliment, which always confuses people when I then say “Actually, I am not [fill in the blank], why do you think so?”

The two most common communities for whom I consider myself a strong ally and hear this about are the bisexual and leather communities. I often joke that the thrill of being thought of as bisexual or a leather dyke is well worth the flack I take for my outspokenness. More simply put, being a married, monogamous and vanilla (ok, maybe with a few chocolate chips), Kinsey 5.9 (big crush on Sting in high school), I need all the excitement I can get.

But seriously, this is the most frustrating thing I experience as an activist and as an active member of the LGBTQ community. Why we do not look at our own biases or internalized phobias about our sexual identity or behavior is truly beyond me. Oh right, phobias are irrational fears and people need to recognize that for themselves. Sigh.

I have stopped trying to explain that and now simply see myself as a truth teller who just takes every opportunity possible to confront biphobia (amongst others) when I see it. One of my friends jokingly says my business card should read “reality based activist.” He seems to think we are a rare breed.

Sadly, this blatant prejudice and ignorance still happens in front of me, often in the company of people I do not expect it from. I was recently at the NGLTF Creating Change conference and even there, at a dinner with colleagues I consider friends, the comments were made that “I don’t know any bisexuals,” “I would not date a bisexual,” and “I don’t think anyone is really bisexual.” If they made those comments and inserted the word gay or lesbian, I noted, what would their response be? Discussion ensued. I hear them say “I never thought about it that way.” Then we had dessert. I hope I made a difference. Welcome to my world.

So here are my reasons for being an ally—which I duly trotted out at that dinner—which might help others in combating the ignorance around bisexuality:

1) Basic non-judgment and respect given our own personal experiences: who are we to judge or disbelieve someone when they tell their story? If I expect to be given the benefit of the doubt about my life how can you impose your own bias on a group of people and deny their truth or their existence?

2) Science: intrinsic human traits, like sexual orientation, gender identity or, for that matter, handedness, are complex, fluid and fall across a spectrum. There is no binary when it comes to things like sexual orientation, gender or whether or not you favor your left of your right. The handedness analogy is the one that people understand best; I use it all the time. I know people like

Renna continues on page 14

## How To Be an Ally To a Bisexual Person

by Ellyn Ruthstrom

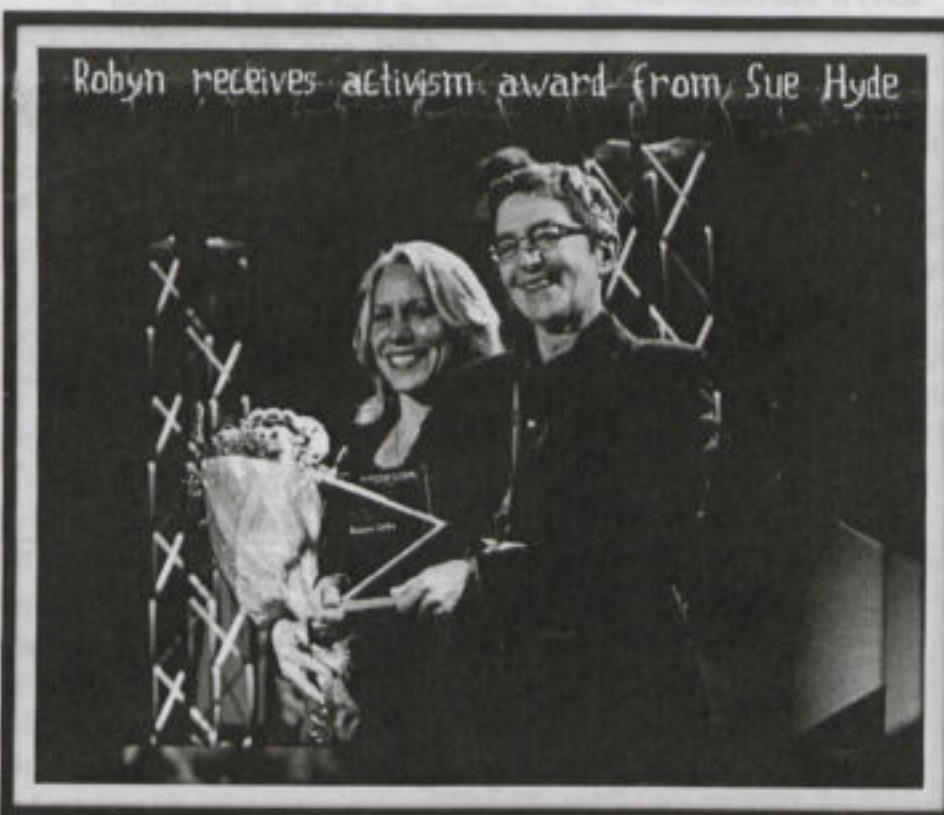
I was walking down the street in Jamaica Plain a few days ago when two people with clipboards approached me and asked, “Do you have time for gay rights?” I cheerfully replied that I always had time for gay rights and stopped to listen to their pitch. The young man took the lead and giggled a little, looking at the woman with him. He seemed new to the task. He began, “The Human Rights Campaign is a gay and lesbian organization...”

I stopped him there, “I thought it was a gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender organization.”

Ruthstrom continues on page 14

## Robyn Ochs Receives Task Force's Susan J. Hyde Activism Award

On January 31, 2009, at the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force's Creating Change Conference in Denver, Robyn was given the 2009 Susan J. Hyde Activism Award for Longevity in the Movement. The award comes with a beautiful plaque, inscribed with the following: “We hear your clear voice, we see your staunch advocacy, and we respond to your loving insistence that our movement includes all of us.” The award came with a check, which Robyn has been happily using to make donations to BBWN, the Bisexual Resource Center, the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition, and La Red: The Network for Battered Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Women. She plans to use the remaining funds to promote the forthcoming editions of *Getting Bi*, which will be released in 2009 in English, in Spanish and in Chinese.



Robyn receives activism award from Sue Hyde



## HONOR ROLL

Jen Bonardi  
Fennel  
Carla Imperial  
Megan Jewett  
Deb Morley  
Ellyn Ruthstrom  
Miriam S.  
Lisa Silveria  
Tracy  
Laurie Wolfe  
Gail Zacharias  
Robyn Ochs  
and  
everyone who  
wrote for this  
issue.

And many more  
fabulous people!  
You know who  
you are!

**Bi Women**  
is published  
quarterly.

Editor:  
**Robyn Ochs**

Arts & Culture  
Editor:  
**Lisa Silveria**

Calendar Editor:  
**Ellyn Ruthstrom**

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## From your editor

The theme of this issue is "Allies." This topic is very important to me. Thinking back to the "bad old days" when out bisexuals were even fewer than today, and we were subjected to relentless biphobia, having our identities, our commitment to the LGBT movement—and sometimes our very existence—challenged, I remember how much it meant to me to when a lesbian or gay man would speak up against biphobia.

I'd like to give specific thanks to my friends Warren Blumenfeld and Leah Fygetakis, two oases in the desert. Warren, a gay man, initiated SpeakOut's name change in which "The Lesbian and Gay Speakers Bureau" became "The Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Speakers Bureau." I still remember the day when he came up to me and said that he thought it was time to change the name. I nodded and agreed, but inside I was thinking, "You're crazy. That will never happen." Well, I was wrong. It did. And I think it really helped that a gay man (rather than a bisexual person) initiated this change, which, after much process, ended up being passed by a large majority of votes. My friend Leah, who identifies as lesbian, was so upset by the biphobia she witnessed that she suggested we organize and facilitate dialogues between lesbian and bi women, which we did.

I'm delighted to offer you a range of articles on the subject. From a bi perspective, Ellyn Ruthstrom gives advice about how to be an ally to bi folks. Rea Carey, Cathy Renna, Gina Siesing and Jenn offer lesbian perspectives on *being* allies to bi women. Dave Herman, a straight man, talks about being partnered with a bi woman, and Lindsay Maddox Pratt offers a genderqueer perspective on the meaning of being an ally. Faith Cheltenham brings in issues of race in the context of the Prop 8 debate and broadens the discussion. I also want to emphasize that being an ally is a two-way street. Stand up for others as you would like them to stand up for you. If you live in Massachusetts, please consider getting involved in the movement to get "gender identity" added to the Commonwealth's nondiscrimination laws. Contact MassEquality ([massequality.org](http://massequality.org)) or the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition ([mtpc.org](http://mtpc.org)) for more information and to get involved.

In addition to our articles on the theme of "allies," we include a new poem by Lindsay Maddox Pratt, and our regular features: our Bi Woman of the Month, news briefs, local bi coverage, including our events calendar and info about local nightlife for women. Our Bis Around the World column takes us this time to Eva Lee in China.

Remember, ladies: this is YOUR newsletter. Please consider supporting us with your dollars (if you have any), and please consider writing something for the next issue!

Bi for now,  
Robyn

## Next in Bi Women

The Bi Women theme  
for the June/July/August issue:

### LABELS

Language is inadequate to convey  
the richness of our complex realities.

Does the word "bisexual" work for  
you? Why? Why not? Have you found  
other words that work better for you?

Are you seeing generational  
differences around labeling?

Let's talk about LABELS.

Deadline: May 10, 2009

Upcoming themes will include:

The Youth Issue; Trans/Gender; Fantasy;  
Choice; Out at Work; and more.

Send your suggestions for future topics to  
[biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com)

## Submit to Bi Women!

Send articles, calendar entries,  
letters, black-and-white art, news,  
and views to:

Bi Women

P.O. Box 301727

Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

or via e-mail to  
[biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com)

If you do not want your name  
published, please tell us.

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newsletter are copyrighted by the  
authors and artists.

The Boston Bisexual Women's Network is a feminist, not-for-profit collective organization whose purpose is to bring women together for support and validation. It is meant to be a safe environment in which women of all sexual self-identities, class backgrounds, racial, ethnic and religious groups, ages, abilities and disabilities are welcome. Through the vehicles of discussion, support, education, outreach, political action and social groups related to bisexuality, we are committed to the goals of full acceptance as bisexuals within the gay and lesbian community, and to full acceptance of bisexuality and the liberation of all gay and transgender people within the larger society.



## Bis Around the World: Eva Lee in Beijing, China

by Robyn Ochs

**Robyn Ochs:** Eva, what a pleasure it is to speak with you! Please tell us about yourself.

**Eva Lee:** I was born and raised in Macau, a former colony of Portugal in eastern China that was returned to China in 1999. It's a small town with a population of only 200,000. In 2000, when I turned 18, I was admitted to one of China's top universities in Shanghai. My mother disapproved of my wish to attend because she believes that girls should stay close to home and get just enough education to get a stable job, then marry and have children. That's how she lived her life. I knew all along I would likely become a clone of my mother if I didn't take control over my own fate. I started tutoring younger children when I was 13, earned some money and saved most of my part-time income. I didn't argue with my mother when she screamed that she was not going to let me go to Shanghai for school; rather the next morning I went and paid for my own tuition. I brought myself tickets and everything and I went. Since then I have lived in Shanghai and then in Beijing. I never want to go back and live in a small town. Growing up, I had little in common with my peers. Chinese girls of my generation were raised to be obedient and put their own needs after those of their parents, husband and children. Fortunately my mother has two younger sisters who are rebels like me—they didn't marry but traveled the world whenever they could. I knew I had to take care of myself in order to be a free woman. I'm one of the handful of girls from my high school class of over 150 who now live elsewhere in the world.

**RO:** Tell briefly your coming out story. How did you become aware that you were

bi? How old were you? Who did you tell? What happened?

**EL:** I knew I was attracted to beautiful boys from age 10. I didn't realize that I was attracted to androgyny until I met my lifetime entanglement—she was 14 and I was 13. I didn't know I was sexually attracted to her for a very long time. We were just "best friends" until the summer I turned 17 when it became very apparent that we were much more than friends. I decided to confess my love, otherwise I would burst. But I was afraid and embarrassed to say it directly—so I brought it up casually when we were chatting online. I asked her what she thought of two girls dating each other. She paused for a few minutes and wrote back: "I'm not gay." I was very hurt. I felt rejected. I did tell a guy friend about my love for a girl, and he gave me moral support.

Then I decided to stick with guys—I dated a bunch of guys in college. When I was 23 I moved to Beijing for a guy I loved but we didn't work out. Then I met my first girlfriend in a lesbian bar and we felt in love and moved in together. I thought we would be in love forever! So I told everybody that I was in love with a woman. I came out to my colleagues, my classmates, my friends and some of my family members.

But a year and a half later, I accidentally ran into my first female love in our hometown. We hadn't seen each other for eight years! But this time the attraction was at its strongest ever—so I told her that I had been in love with her eight years ago. I just wanted to make peace with myself. She was stunned. She eventually said that she has been in love with me, even after all the years we didn't see each other. She didn't even remember saying that she wasn't gay! We fell madly in love this time and I broke up with my first girlfriend for her. But unfortunately she's a closeted person and I love myself too much to live in the closet, so it didn't work out.

I've had quite a few relationships and none of them worked out—so I'm staying away from relationships for a while! Now I'm an out bisexual woman in my community and I don't give a damn if some people have a problem with me. I actually don't like labels but I'm

doing the bi label for political reasons—we just have to take one step at a time with the LGBTIQ movement. Currently I'm physically more into masculinity and spiritually more into femininity. But I'm still open to possibilities—I currently have a crush on a FTM (female to male) and I think he's very cute and has the tenderest heart. But I'm not doing relationships, so it will pass and next time I could see myself falling for a MTF!

**RO:** What words are used to describe lesbian, gay, bi or non-heterosexual people in China?

**EL:** "Lala," for lesbians—it mimics the pronunciation of lesbian in English; "Shuang," meaning double, for bisexual; "Tongzhi," meaning comrade, for gay. For non-heterosexual people, we now have the term "Ku'er" mimicking the pronunciation of the word queer in English. But it's a new term so not very commonly used yet. In China's gay history, gay men were called "glass" (boli), "rabbit" (tuzi), etc. There was no word for lesbians in the past, or if there was, it's not commonly known.

**RO:** What resources—if any—are available for LGBT people in Beijing, and for how long have they existed?

**EL:** There are always a few gay bars, mostly for gay men. Gay men usually went to the parks too. The LGBT scene in Beijing began to thrive in the past three years. When I first came out in 2005, there were just weekly gatherings for lesbian and bisexual women. Our organizing was in its infancy, with only about 10 women active in lesbian organizing. Over the years, the team has grown to more than 40 people, counting only those who are consistent with their activism. Our regular activities get around 20-30 people, and our annual girls party got almost 300 people in 2008 and over 400 in 2009. Three years ago, I never would have imagined this.

Another indicator of progress is the clubbing scene. Three years ago, there was only one lesbian bar and a Saturday lesbian night at a straight bar. It's funny and awkward to run into my ex's exes,

*Eva Lee, continues on page 12*





## Getting Bi in a Changing Landscape: a view from Creating Change '09

by Amanda Morgan

I only heard about Creating Change fairly recently. In the winter of '08, I heard that there was "some gay organizing thing" that my college was sending some students to, all expenses paid. Sounded intriguing, but it was too late for me to get involved and I was too consumed with my senior thesis to really give it much thought. Despite my outspoken political nature, I didn't have much contact with OPEN, the LGBT student group on campus. My organizing centered more around the Women of Color Organization, which was home to many queer and bi women and allowed me to address issues of racial and economic justice at the same time as issues surrounding sex and sexuality.

It was my passion for intersectionality that led me to becoming the Vaid fellow at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute in September. I was ecstatic to be in a place that "focuses on racial and economic justice broadly defined" and within an LGBT context. As January began, and so with it the frenetic push towards Creating Change, I was excited to see this conference for myself while simultaneously representing the Task Force.

At the conference, I somehow managed to expand my already tightly packed schedule to accommodate nearly a full day of bi-related activity whilst maintaining all my (numerous) Task Force related commitments. And I am sure glad that I did, because of all my wonderful experiences at Creating Change, those are the most memorable and inspiring.

I began Friday (well, after my 7:30 a.m. NGLTF staff meeting and an hour

at Kinko's...) at the workshop presented by BiNet's president, Luigi Ferrer, and Stewart Landers from the Department of Public Health: *Bisexual Health: What Do We Know and What Do We Do*. Even though I missed the first twenty minutes thanks to my Kinko's debacle, it was already a breath of fresh air to be in a room full of bis and bi allies. I hadn't fully felt how gay-centric my life had become until I sat down in that circle. This was a feeling that would become more palpable as the day wore on. Listening to other folks share their stories of remaining closeted with their health care professionals as well as the costs of coming out, I felt the old bisexual fire coming back to me as I recalled viscerally the biased treatment (as well as the false information) I had received from my old gynecologist. Why is it so difficult for medical professions to tell the difference between behavior and identity? And how dare someone be a provider of sexual health and not know or understand how my sexuality functions and how I may or may not be vulnerable to disease!

After a brief break (i.e. another visit to Kinko's...) I returned to the same room to experience Robyn Och's workshop *Crossing Lines: Identity and the Sexuality Spectrum*. As someone who spends a lot of time thinking (and obsessing about) boundaries and boundary crossing, I was pleasantly surprised by the new things I learned as well as by how much fun I had. I was aware of Kinsey and Klein but not of Michael Storms and his scale. Moreover, I was simply enlivened by the number of folks who showed up to the workshop and were so engaged in this unpacking of assumptions concerning sexual identity and behavior. With all the bi-phobia and

bi-invisibility members of our community have experienced—who would have thought that there would be such a display of enthusiasm! Robyn's exercise wherein folks created their own multi-level sexuality scale throughout time illustrated so beautifully how tenuous these categories to which we grasp really are. Everyone fluctuates and many folks idealized a place on the

scale at which they were not. How much time we waste privileging another sexual identity over our own...

After that burst of light, it was back to official Task Force business until I joined the Bisexual/Fluid Caucus where I was finally confronted by something which I had been (mostly) successfully avoiding thinking about all day. It had been hovering in the back of my brain like a sore spot that only hurts when you touch it but never really goes away. The previous evening we had been blessed by the inspiring presence of labor organizer Dolores Huerta. Only one problem—she left the B out of the LGBT. *Sigh*, I thought to myself. *Typical. But she probably didn't mean it right?* But it doesn't matter what she means, making us invisible is not excusable. *Yes, yes, I know, but...* And then there were so many other things I had to do and take care of I was distracted from this argument with my inner-bi, until Rea Carey's *State of the Movement* address. Again it was Lesbian! Gay! Transgender! I kept waiting for the bi but it never came. Bye Bi. Hello, that familiar pain in my chest and stomach. It sits and grows and feeds off of my own bi-phobia as long as I stay silent. I looked around for an ally but I couldn't find one. Just a bunch of happy gays and non-bi identified queers and trans folks. It seemed like I was the only one who was upset, so I pretended like I wasn't.

Of course I wasn't alone. It only felt that way and the caucus was a wonderful reminder of this. We had all noticed our lack of representation and thankfully Robyn had done something about it. She read us, with Rea's permission, an email exchange between her and Rea before and after Rea's realization of her accidental omission. Rea agreed with the need to make amends and scheduled a meeting with Robyn for early the following day. We at the caucus spent some time discussing what we would like Robyn to bring to Rea. *What do we want? What do we need to feel welcome and to advance as a movement in our own right? What exactly is a bi issue? What are we organizing around? What can we form our movement around besides inclusion in the LGT?*

We came up with many answers and possible solutions. Among them, we decided that we want to see a bi inclusivity section in the Creating Change program book analogous to the sections on transgender etiquette and creating accessibility as well as bi inclusivity training for all conference presenters. Who among us hasn't sunk down in our chairs or felt our cheeks go flushed when a purportedly inclusive LGBT space suddenly feels distinctly

Morgan, continues on next page



Bi/Fluid Caucus at Creating Change



Morgan, continued from last

gay or trans but definitively not bi? This is unacceptable, especially from presenters at a conference on LGBT organizing, and must be stopped. A section on bi inclusivity would address such issues as language usage (don't forget the B in LGBT, say different sex or same sex couple instead of gay or straight couple) and assumptions (don't assume people in different sex relationships are straight and don't assume people in same sex relationships are gay) Hopefully, this would help to alleviate the invisibility and the hostility that has been felt by community members at Creating Change.

We also want to see bi youth leadership development, a Task Force bisexual leadership roundtable, increased visibility especially of bi people of color and bi youth, more bi programming (not at conflicting times), the bi tool kit (a project undertaken by an intern last summer) completed and released and, of course, who doesn't like the sound of the National Gay Lesbian Bisexual and Transgender Task Force?

Actually, many of us do have some degree of contention with the label bisexual even as we struggle to promote

visibility of bisexuality. We discussed possible new terms that would be more inclusive of our community members while not reinforcing the gender binary. The conversation also moved beyond Creating Change and the Task Force as we discussed larger issues facing our community, such as the domestic partnership being legally restricted to same sex couples only in certain spheres. Believe it or not, there are those of us who would prefer domestic partnership to marriage—for everyone—even if we are in different sex relationships. So how do we address this part of the marriage movement while still being supportive of the gains made by our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters?

In short, even as we celebrated the recognition of Robyn's incredible longevity in the movement (Congratulations on the Susan J. Hyde Activism Award, Robyn!), we realize we have a long way to go. There is no bisexual organization in the U.S. that has the resources to have a paid staff. Many attendees were not even aware of BiNet or the Bisexual Resource Center. Here we are trying to reach across communities while it seems we are barely aware of each other. Yet, when we did meet and reach out to one another at the caucus as well as at the bi dinner, which was held after the caucus, we found, as I believe we knew we



would, similar stories around the room. We do have complex and multilayered identities that expand beyond and within the bi, but we are all fighting to be seen and heard and not defamed. We are fighting for the right to marry (or not marry and still have benefits and have our partnerships recognized respected and celebrated) whom we chose and we fight for others to have those rights as well. And we all feel sharply the pain that comes when these things are lacking, as they often are. We are all hungering for a movement and an active supportive community. Thanks to everyone I met Friday, I am beginning to see how that's done.

Amanda lives in New York City.

## On Being an Ally

Rea Carey, Executive Director, The Task Force

*The Task Force builds the grassroots power of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. As part of a broader social justice movement, we work to create a nation that respects the diversity of human expression and identity and creates opportunity for all.*

When I came out as lesbian in the early 80s at the age of 16, other friends of mine, both young men and women were coming out... or in most cases forced to hide in the closet with the door just barely cracked open. Most of us identified as either gay or lesbian. Not bi and not trans. And, yet, I knew that some of our friends were likely bi and although we didn't have the word "trans" then, I knew that many of us were gender non-conforming and were harassed for it. It wasn't until much later that a number of my friends had the courage, strength or support to come out as bisexual. As they did, I found my role as an ally to be important to them and to our friendships because so many gay, lesbian or straight people rejected them or refused to believe the truth they were telling. Sadly, this is still the case today.

I felt the power of being an ally—and having an ally—again recently when, during my speech at our Creating Change conference I was incredibly nervous and did something that is quite unlike me: I didn't say "bisexual" when describing our

community even though "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender" was written right there in front of my eyes and I've said it thousands of times. I had no idea I had done this, but fortunately, a woman who has been a role model, teacher, and friend to me—Robyn Ochs—took the risk of being my ally and pointed out my mistake. She did so with care, firm clarity, and respect. By Robyn being an ally to me, she gave me the gift of allowing myself to be a better ally to the bi community and I decided to publicly apologize for my mistake. What happened in the hours and days afterward was powerful. Dozens of people including conference volunteers, activists, and staff of our movement's organizations came out to me as bi and said how hard it was to be openly bi in their community, family or organizations.

Unfortunately, we still have a long way to go in this country and in the LGBT movement to embrace the true breadth of human experience and sexuality and to affirm the lives of our bi brothers and sisters. I believe that when one person is left behind, or ignored, or disrespected in our community, we are all left behind, ignored and disrespected. And, when any one of us has the strength to speak the truth about who we are and who we love, that is a gift to us all.

To be a lesbian who works to be an ally to the bi community is a life's work. It is an ongoing experience of learning, taking risks, admitting mistakes, speaking out and standing up for others who may not always be able to speak for themselves. It is to challenge ourselves and each other to be better allies each and every day. This is a challenge I happily accept.



# Internal Allies, Always Learning: Snapshot of a Dialogue

by Gina Siesing and her friend Jenn

## Gina's Reflections:

I was in Northampton, in the campus center at Smith College, hanging out with a good friend from the martial arts world and talking in a far-ranging way about feminist and queer politics, organizations we've known and loved, personal growth journeys, etc. It was a rich, heart-warming, though-provoking conversation. At some point, Jenn pointed out that, once we feel empowered with the knowledge we can and will take care of ourselves, it's our responsibility to stand up for others also. I agreed and mentioned that I occasionally have opportunities to speak up when people say ignorantly bi-phobic things, assuming or not caring that people in hearing range may identify as bi and/or care about bi people. These moments always pain me because the people I most often hear uttering bi-phobic jokes or comments purport to be feminist, queer, and politically aware. Yet they somehow consider maligning another group of people acceptable. It's always shocking.

Jenn bravely admitted that she "still has trouble with this one," meaning that she's not comfortable with bisexuality. What a great opportunity! Here we had been agreeing about the wonderful inclusiveness of "queer" and "dyke" as labels for ourselves and our communities, and we'd been talking about the interconnectedness of various forms of oppressions, and yet! Jenn revealed a not-uncommon belief born of a particular experience and a particular interpretation of that experience: she had once dated a woman who left her for a man in a painful way; she concluded from that experience that "bisexual" women were not to be trusted because they might hurt her in this way. And of course large portions of our culture,

hetero and queer, reinforced this belief over the years.

Because I love my friend Jenn and know she's a right-on woman, it was relatively simple to challenge her, to encourage her to acknowledge that a) people who identify under any label can be faithless or faithful, dishonest or honest, messy in their relationships or skillful and forthright; b) self-identified bisexuals are one of the original and most fabulous groups to refuse rigid boxes, "queers" par excellence, and in my experience one of the most likely communities of people to reflect deeply on personal journeys, to value integrity and clear communication, and to question inherited cultural beliefs and prejudices; and c) it just ain't right to harbor prejudice against a group of people. I told her about the long history of the Boston Bi Women's community, which impressed her since she has a deep appreciation for women's history and community. I recommended the *Bi Women* newsletter and some books on bisexuality as a way to move through old beliefs and into a happier place, and Jenn was very open to getting past her "trouble with this one."

I think of myself as an "internal ally" because I have identified as bi in my life and because I think we're all potential allies for each other: it hurts me at least as much as it hurts my bi lover or friend when someone expresses biphobia in my presence. It especially hurts if I don't find a creative or courageous way to speak up or to acknowledge the biphobia explicitly with the people I'm with. Every one of these moments is an opportunity for taking back our integrity and for healing ridiculous, but persistent, prejudices. Here's to alliance, to finding our voices, and to a world of respect for the diverse and evolving humans we are.

[I shared my reflections above with Jenn, and Jenn sent her wonderful reflections below back to me. We agreed to shape a shared piece for *Bi Women*....]

## Jenn's Reflections:

I have been thinking more about my "biphobia" and why it seems to be a difficult one to get over..., and I think, somewhere in there..., there is something to do with privilege, heteronormative privilege, the ability to walk in and out of that privilege. I have more sympathy/understanding/admiration for those of our trans brothers and sisters who openly embrace that "trans" "label": not one or the other, but something new and different that doesn't fit into our binary gendered society. I have the same disdain for lesbian women whom I see "assimilating" to heteronormative standards. I think I am a counter-culture elitist!

As we discovered when we began talking more about your experiences with bi-folk, you have encountered people who are challenging that heteronormative view of the world, who are saying, "Hey, don't make any assumptions about me; I may be a woman with a man right now, but I am not 'straight.'" My experience with said girl who done me wrong and the bi-girls I met at Smith had been more, "After a few drinks I'll fool around with a girl, but in the public eye I want to be on the arm of a guy, with all the privilege that goes with it in our society."

I am excited to experience more of the politically minded bisexual community you've been a part of! Thank you for challenging me!

## Brunch Coordinator Invites You to Host

BBWN potluck brunches are a great way to meet other bi women in the Boston area. We try to hold a brunch in a member's home each month so that people can relax and share food and experiences in a safe space. Deb Morley is the brunch coordinator, so please contact her at [debmo345@gmail.com](mailto:debmo345@gmail.com) if you are interested in hosting a brunch. And check out the calendar on pages 15-16 for upcoming activities. We hope you can join us.

## Do You Know Web Design?

We're looking for someone to get [biwomenboston.org](http://biwomenboston.org), our new website, up and running. If you are interested, please contact Robyn: [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com). It's the perfect volunteer job, as you can do it from home, in your pajamas, or even in your birthday suit.



## Lisa and Me

by Dave Herman

Back in college, I told my girlfriend that I had once briefly dated a boy, and she very nearly dumped me. A man who would even consider kissing another man did not fit the role she had imagined for me. So years later, when I first met my partner Lisa and she told me she was bisexual, my immediate reaction was relief. I could let the cat out of the bag right away; no need for secrets.

But as fate and hormones would have it, I'm straight—bored by football, able to sing every lyric to *Les Misérables*, but nonetheless primarily attracted to women. (I might make an exception for Neil Patrick Harris, but nobody's 100% consistent.) So after the initial euphoria of finding someone to accept me as I am, next came the gradual recognition that my partner and I do not have the same sexual orientation. I doubt I could fully explain quite what this means in practice. It's both entirely personal and something we are still learning about. I know it hasn't always been easy for Lisa, nor has it for me. Relationships between the sexes are different from same-sex relationships, and that has to mean Lisa's missing something. For me, I think it demands a certain level of confidence, one I don't necessarily always have, to know that I am not everything to this woman I love. By the time we met, Lisa and I had had enough of childish and co-dependent relationships. We were each seeking a complement, not a human crutch.

I am sure we have more tough conversations ahead. But I have a partner who is honest with herself and accepting of me. And we both enjoy pointing out cute girls to each other. What more could you ask for?

*Dave is a graduate student at Northeastern University. When he isn't traveling for academic conferences or industrial committee meetings, Dave enjoys playing the piano for his sweetheart and her cats.*

## Expanding Allies

by Lindsay Maddox Pratt

Working in gender-justice work, the subject of allies comes up frequently in my life. "How to be a good ally" is an ongoing conversation that I have with faculty and staff at the college where I work and lead workshops in transgender sensitivity. As someone who is also in the process of coming out as genderqueer, it is also a conversation that I have been having with friends who wish to support me in my process. I would say that I am rather more versed in the concept of allies than your average person, yet when it comes to being a good ally to fellow queer or genderqueer friends I find that I still have a lot to learn.

Being a good ally to someone who is facing discrimination similar to that which I face myself is more difficult than I ever expected. How do I respond when I myself feel triggered by the comment/behavior in question? How do I support others while at the same time recognize that I myself may need support?

A couple of months ago when I was beginning transitioning with pronoun use, a friend of mine with a similar identity found himself struggling with how to be an ally to me. Having spent years teaching people how to be allies to him in his process, he found himself stumped when faced with the need to be an ally to someone with a

similar experience. At the same time I was questioning my ability to be an ally to him while I was depending on him to be mine. I began to be critical of myself for not being able to speak up due to my own emotional state when I recognized that speaking up was exactly what was called for. This self-criticism only served to exacerbate the problem—it did nothing to help me become a better ally to him and stopped me from being an ally to myself.

It is easy to slip into self-criticism which can, oh so quickly, lead to internalizing the oppression and becoming our own perpetrators. This makes it vitally important when doing ally work to have compassion for ourselves, our mistakes, and our own sensitivities, understanding that each of us is going to have moments and situations in which we are unable to stand up for someone in our community. Not being able to speak up in the moment does not make us bad allies. On the contrary, it creates the opportunity to expand our perception of what ally work can look like.

Ally work does not always mean addressing the discriminatory or ignorant remark in the moment, it may mean lending an ear, empathizing, letting someone know that they are not alone, or that there is nothing wrong with feeling hurt. Opening up our definition of ally work also makes room for greater ability to be allies to ourselves—what a novel concept! By working to accept my own identity and,

indeed, to value it, I am fighting against the tendency to repeat the hurtful comments that I hear. At the same time, forgiving myself when I do repeat them can go great lengths towards dissipating their negative charge. As Patty Griffin poignantly sang, "everybody needs a little forgiveness."

This leads me to my final (for the moment) comment on allies: if you are ever unsure of what someone needs/wants from you as an ally—ask! Not one of us knows what is needed in every situation. Have compassion for your own moments of ignorance and uncertainty, and don't be afraid to ask for guidance. While I say this a lot when it comes to addressing preferred pronoun use (by the way I prefer ze and hir) it applies to so much more. We should all feel more empowered when we see a fellow queer/gay/bi/trans community member who looks like they may need an ally to ask them what that would look like. We may not always be able to give exactly what they may need, and that's okay. But by asking we are saying, "I value what you have to say and I am willing to listen." Something as simple as that can go a long way in this battle against oppression.

*Lindsay lives in San Francisco and studies psychology and queer studies at City College of San Francisco. Ze has many interests, including acting and poetry. One of hir poems appears on page 11.*



## Revolution No. 8

By Faith Cheltenham

*"Gays should protest black people! The new conflict is gays vs. blacks, and blacks vs. gays. And black gays vs. themselves. It's gonna be great."*

—Stephen Colbert

I've been waving a sign on street corners since H8 passed: "Black Queers." Responses have varied—from honks of support to looks of disapproval from blacks and whites. A black woman came up to me at a rally and asked me if I didn't think the sign was offensive to black people. She looked around as if there were a person in charge of things like this, someone who could head-nod in disagreement.

I said, "It's who I am, and people should know," flipping it over to reveal another slogan: "We Do Exist." When I carry the sign in the middle of a crowd, it faces in and then out, equally interchanged—a message to my communities.

"We've been going up to the church every weekend to volunteer. You know they want to sue our church if we refuse to marry them?" my dad says.

My dad used to come to rallies I planned for National Coming Out Week at University of California, Los Angeles; he was the first family member I chose to come out to as a lesbian (and then as a bisexual). He respected and comfortably got along with my transgender girlfriend, always saying, "I love you for who you are."

"They" got to him and to most of my immediate and extended African-American family over the age of 21. Mormons deviously targeted one of their most unlikely allies for a campaign of misinformation. Enemy of my enemy won the day, but I actually find the subsequent discourse regarding "black backlash" highly encouraging.

Anger is getting people to talk and making them ask hard questions. I met an African-American couple who shared their experience volunteering for No on 8 even while they dealt with discriminatory comments from within. Since we all happened to be at the same rally, we walked over and talked to Lorri Jean of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center. She was aghast, saying, "We've got a lot of educating to do in our own communities."

Instead of continuing to talk to my loving mother about how hard the struggle is for black queers, I asked her if she voted yes. "I love you and accept you as you

*I've been waving a sign on street corners since H8 passed: "Black Queers." Responses have varied—from honks of support to looks of disapproval from both blacks and whites. A black woman came up to me at a rally and asked me if I didn't think the sign was offensive to black people. I said, "It's who I am, and people should know."*

are," she said, "but I cannot support your marriage to a woman." Honest, and very to the point—"marriage is religious," "it is representative of the black family," it's the new tent pole for the Christian right, and it's held aloft by the moral high ground assigned to blacks by mainstream culture. It's really not a good thing for anyone, for when the backlash against proponents of H8 begins, African-Americans are first in the line of fire. African-Americans did vote disproportionately for Prop. 8, and as a community we are also disproportionately affected by HIV, the cops, access to quality education, and glass ceilings.

Somehow I see a correlation. I see ties between bigotry, fear, and ignorance—but how do you get beyond that to love?

"This God = Love stuff I just don't get," says the black pastor on the corner of La Cienega and Centinela, in the predominantly African-American Ladera Heights neighborhood. "Keith," as I'll call him, came up to us as our flag-waving wound down, saying he had a couple of questions.

At first Keith didn't know a single gay person. As the corner grew colder, Keith remembered his cousin who'd moved away and didn't keep in touch. "Married for years and now he has a partner up in San Fran."

I asked Keith, "Do you know how many of us are gone from the table during Thanksgiving?"

"Your choice, your choice," the usual response.

A multicultural group of us—including blacks, Latinos, Jewish, and non-culturally identified—kept talking to Keith, and each of us had different ways of approaching the phobia. I prayed that God would bless his heart with understanding as he had mine. I wanted to argue the biblical points I long ago reconciled between me and my Jesus. I wanted to bring up Huey Newton's support for the Gay Liberation Front in the '70s.

Others took the legal route, talking about Social Security and insurance benefits. One or two just wanted to shout "equal rights" in his ear as they continued to make the circuit around us. We were as different as can be, yet united for the same cause and finally representing every side of the rainbow.

I'm more hopeful than some of my African LGBT peers that the mainstream

will embrace queers of color as essential to winning this fight.

When I first began going to my favorite restaurant-bar, the Abbey, nearly 10 years ago, I was usually the only black in the place and often got asked if I was lost. These days there's less need for the customary head-nod African-Americans employ to recognize strangers in strange lands. In my family I've been able to see progression as well: My mother still speaks in tongues, but she now believes God made me a certain way. She hasn't found a way to see my love as the same, as worthy of tradition, but I'm still going to sit at her table and try.

I need my LGBT community to support my efforts, while it understands at the same time that there are discriminations that only people of color face. Perhaps we've all spent too long creating separate "safe spaces." We need to get uncomfortable in our skin so we can grow new ones fully free of internal bigotries. It's been unfortunate to see "Gay Is the New Black" and similar signs springing up during rallies. Or hearing comments like "What is this? A Latino rally or gay rights? Why are they chanting in Spanish?"

The truth remains: People of color have fought for civil rights in the past and still fight. People of color have the most experience changing hearts and minds over generations, and the same must happen for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community—so why not find the overlapping pieces as key to solving the puzzle?

**"Quite the contrary, maybe a homosexual could be the most revolutionary." —Huey Newton, Black Panther Party cofounder.**

*Faith is a blogger, activist and poet. Read more of her work at [www.faithish.com](http://www.faithish.com).*

This article first appeared in *The Advocate*, November 14, 2008. It is reprinted with permission.



## NEWS BRIEFS

### Majority of Mass. Legislators Co-sponsor An Act Relative to Gender-Based Discrimination and Hate Crimes

104 of 200 Massachusetts legislators have signed on as co-sponsors of this bill which will prohibit gender-based discrimination and protect transgender people in Massachusetts. Please go to [www.masstpc.org](http://www.masstpc.org), find out how our legislator voted, thank them if they have signed on as sponsors, and ask them to vote for the bill if they have not. Help make Massachusetts a full equality state.

### Out Bi Politician

Newark, Delaware City Councilman Ezra Temko introduced and got support from the City Council for an anti-discrimination ordinance based on sexual orientation and won support to add gender identity to the city's non-discrimination clause in its personnel policy. He also got the Council to agree to research health benefits for the city's domestic partners and the creation of a domestic partner registry.

And, on top of that, he came out of the closet publicly, in an interview with the *Newark Post*. Said Temko, 23: "I'm bi. I've dated girls before, but I've been with my boyfriend, Drew, since August and we're planning to get engaged this summer. During college, I was in a very inclusive environment that embraced everyone, instead of accepting norms as legitimate on face value. I was able, in this environment, to explore who I was and realize that I'm bisexual. I always assumed I would end up with a girl; then I met Drew."  
(from the [newarkpostonline.com](http://newarkpostonline.com))

### Americana

I don't know if anyone has already seen this or not, but I was at Walmart the other day looking for a "Thinking of You" card and saw something I never thought I would see. You know how cards have the little dividers in between them, For Him, For Her, Love, etc. There was one that caught my eye since it said, "Coming Out" I read the rainbow colored card and it was pretty good. I just never thought I would see it at Walmart here in Kansas City.

—posted by Kelly on one of the bi lists

## Equal Rights in Nepal

A Nepali MP has said his "eyes were filled with tears" when he read the full written decision of the country's Supreme Court on a writ petition from four organisations representing lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people.

A summary decision was issued in December 2007, when the court issued directive orders to the Nepal government to ensure the right to life according to their own identities and introduce laws providing equal rights to LGBTIs and amend all the discriminatory laws.

The final judgement was issued today.

It reiterates that all LGBTIs are defined as a "natural person" and their physical growth as well as sexual orientation, gender identity, expression are all part of natural growing process. Thus equal rights, identity and expression must be ensured regardless of their sex at birth.

The writ petition was filed by Blue Diamond Society and other 3 LGBTI organisations in Nepal demanding the protection and defence of the equal rights of sexual and gender minorities.

"Reading this decision my eyes were filled with tears and I felt we are the most proud LGBTI citizens of Nepal in the world," said Sunit Pant, Nepal's only gay MP.

"A legal note of point has been raised for the new constitution of Nepal while ensuring the equal rights to individuals, like the bill of rights from South Africa, and non-discrimination provisions on the grounds of sexual orientations and gender identities must be introduced."

The Court has also issued a directive order to form a seven-member committee, with a doctor appointed by Health Ministry, one representative from National Human rights commission, the Law Ministry, one socialist appointed by government of Nepal, a representative from the Nepal police, a representative from Ministry of Population and Environment and one advocate as a representative from the LGBTI community, to conduct a study into the other countries' practice on same-sex marriage.

Based on its recommendation the government will introduce a same-sex marriage bill.

(from [www.pinknews.co.uk/news/articles/2005-9597.html](http://www.pinknews.co.uk/news/articles/2005-9597.html))

## Equal Marketing

So, I just saw this cute IKEA commercial. It shows a lady assembling a chest o draws and there is another lady there just speaking about how much she saved and how easy it is to put together but she finishes with "and now with all of that money you saved you can go and by some new clothes to go in it, and maybe meet a new man or woman, I don't judge."

—posted by Peter on one of the bi lists



## Bi Programming at the APA Convention

by Kimberly Jorgensen, MA

The annual convention of the American Psychological Association (APA) was held August 14-17 at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center. During this year's convention the Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues (Division 44) hosted several formal programming sessions as well as informal opportunities for discussion and networking. In addition to several interesting LGBT-related programs, there was one symposium dedicated solely to current research on bisexuality as well as an informal bi discussion hour in the Division's hospitality suite.

As a bi woman and a doctoral counselor-in-training at the University of North Dakota, I am always eager to hear about new research and meet with the researchers and clinicians working with LGBT people. I am personally invested in their findings, and I also aim to serve LGBTIQ people in my counseling practice. I am working on a dissertation about minority stress and the experiences of people with sexual identities beyond heterosexual or homosexual. At the convention I had the pleasure of meeting and talking with many noted psychologists and professionals who have produced pivotal work that has informed my own research. It's always exciting to meet the author of a book or an impressive research article I've read.

My favorite experience of the conference was attending the Bi Discussion Hour hosted by Division 44. After seeing

the symposium on bisexuality research earlier in the day, I was able to talk informally with Ron Fox, Emily Page, Bobbi Keppel, Robyn Ochs, Alan Hamilton and others as a junior colleague and community member. For a psychologist-in-training, this is the equivalent of meeting Hollywood celebrities. I not only met celebrities, but I was welcomed and supported by them.

At one point during the discussion hour, the focus shifted to experiences of bi professionals in rural areas where affirming organizations and services are scarce, giving two of us the chance to express our frustrations about serving and living in sexual minority communities in North Dakota. This opportunity to share about my life and work and get feedback from successful people in the bi community was exciting and refreshing. Being in a room full of bisexual-identified people and supportive others was a privilege I am rarely able to experience. I returned to the Midwest reenergized in my activism and outreach efforts. I made new professional and personal contacts and am excited to take part in next year's bi programming at APA in Toronto!

*Kimberly is a doctoral student in Counseling Psychology at the University of North Dakota, serves part-time as the GLBTA Programs Coordinator at the University of Minnesota – Crookston and is active in several local and regional advocacy efforts. She is a co-chair of the Bisexual Empowerment Conference (BECAUSE) to be held in Minneapolis, MN, April 17-19, 2009. For more information: [www.becauseconference.org](http://www.becauseconference.org).*



Hong Kong Pride 2008. Eva Lee is 2nd from the left



Faith Cheltenham



Jen shares a poem at the January poetry brunch at Fennel's house



# The Mapping of my Body

by Lindsay Maddox Pratt

I stand before you, uncertain and wavering,  
in a moment of still light,  
pregnant with the weight of its potential.  
If I stripped down before you,  
showed you my parts like a patient  
spread before your view  
would you understand me less?  
Or would the anatomizing  
lend itself like a map open upon the dash,  
letting you trace my latitude with your fingertips  
till you find the corresponding number of my heart?  
Would you think  
"I know where you are"?  
Would you use it now  
to catch me and hold me under a pin?  
Find a glass case to keep me in?

I draw a broken line  
along my breasts.  
Under florescent lights  
I see bruises  
and past scars of misunderstood wishes,  
but in this streetlight-flooded room  
it's all a faded yellow  
and I am thankful for the friendly ambiguity of shadows,  
making a marriage of  
silicone lines and flesh.

What would a young girl do  
with my boy's yearning  
but pretend  
or walk away,  
leaving me to the solitude  
of my sweet disaster?

In the dull glow of evening  
I regret this fear of cartography  
which makes me answer him in tears,  
so he can never find his way  
into my home  
and I can stay  
an undiscovered country.

*Lindsay, 24, lives in San Francisco and studies psychology and Queer Studies at City College at San Francisco, and works with the Gender Diversity Project, an organization focused on transgender activism within Education. In addition, Lindsay is an actor, artist and singer.*

## PRIDE BRUNCH ORGANIZERS AND VOLUNTEERS WANTED

for our tradiional "brunch before the March on Saturday, June 13th. Please send an email to Ellyn: elruthstrom@comcast.net if you are interested in helping out

## Women's Nightlife in the Boston Area

### THURSDAYS

Women's Dance Night at the Midway Café  
3496 Washington St, Jamaica Plain  
617-524-9038  
[www.myspace.com/wonkyproductions](http://www.myspace.com/wonkyproductions)

### FRIDAYS

Dance night at PURE  
10 pm - 2 am  
75 Warrenton St, Boston  
617-417-0186

### SATURDAYS

Second Saturdays at Machine Nightclub  
1254 Boylston St, Boston, 21+, \$10  
[www.dykenight.com](http://www.dykenight.com)

Every Saturday at Randolph Country Club  
New look. New atmosphere. Everybody welcome.  
RCC, 44 Mazzeo Dr., Randolph  
10 pm - 2 am. 21+, \$5  
[www.myspace.com/peachesrcc](http://www.myspace.com/peachesrcc)

### SUNDAYS

Women's night every Sunday. Doors open at 7, The L Word at 9.  
DJ msladyj with an eclectic mix from house to jazz.  
No cover, complimentary appetizers, 21+  
STIX Restaurant & Lounge, 35 Stanhope Street, Boston  
857-233-6032



January poetry brunch at Fennel's

And then, of course, there are always BBWN's fabulous potluck brunches for bi women and our friends. Our brunches are held in women's homes, and ALL women are welcome. See our calendar (pp. 15 and 16) for details.



Eva Lee, continued from page 3

since everybody went to the same places. It's almost like *The L Word*. But we now have a slightly bigger selection. As far as I know, there are four lesbian bars and three Saturday lesbian nightclubs in Beijing. It's not many, but still a substantial improvement. Even in Hong Kong or Taipei, there are fewer than four! This change gives you an idea of how lesbian identity has grown stronger. And I can tell you, only a very small number of the lesbians I know go to lesbian bars regularly. But these bars seem to be making some good money.

**RQ:** You have traveled extensively and made connections with LGBT activists abroad. What value, if any, do you see in international activism, in particular in keeping in touch with bi activists in other countries? Do you think the movement in China has been inspired/influenced by movements in other countries, or has been an inspiration/influence on others?

**EL:** International activism has definitely helped and will continue to help our activism in China, simply because it shows that we are not alone in this fight—we can support and learn from each other! Personally, I get so much positive energy from my international peers! Their dedication and bravery have been my source of strength and driving force. They made me an LGBT activist. I do think China has been influenced by movements in other countries—look at our vocabulary for LGBT people! China has been inspired by Western influences, some good and some bad. In terms of the LGBT movement, I'm positive that it's a good influence for us.

**RQ:** Why do you participate in LGBT activism? What do you get from doing this? Why do you stay involved?

**EL:** I just have a passion to fight injustice. I have been a feminist all

my life—I was treated as secondary to boys when growing up and I had to fight a lot harder for the same rights they have. That's not how I think things should be. As for LGBT activism, I believe that I must do my part if I ever expect my rights to be acknowledged. I saw how things change over time under a lot of activists' effort, and I want to be part of the change. Doing this empowers me to express my true self.

**RQ:** What are your plans or visions for future activism?

**EL:** I'm committed to be part of the growing activism in China—I'm pretty hopeful that I will be able to marry a person of my same sex, if I want to. And of course, all kind of anti-discrimination laws to protect LGBT people will be in place. I predict that this will happen within 20 years.



## UPCOMING CONFERENCES:

**True Colors Conference** in Storrs, CT, March 12-14. For info: [www.ourtruecolors.org](http://www.ourtruecolors.org). For LGBTQIA youth.

**Bisexual Empowerment Conference: A Uniting, Supportive Experience (BECAUSE)** 2009—April 17-19, 2009; Minneapolis, MN. The BECAUSE Conference is the premier weekend event in the Midwest for bisexuals, queers, trans, bi-curious, questioning, and all others, regardless of identity. This conference is open to everyone! Register today and bring a friend! Location: Coffman Union, University of Minnesota, 300 Washington Ave. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455. Register today at <http://www.becauseconference.org/>. Robyn Ochs will be the keynote speaker, and there will be a broad selection of workshops.

**Bi Media Summit: Putting the B in LGBT.** May 30, 2009. A day-long conference in New York City at the LGBT Center. For more information: Sheela Lambert (212-928-3558 or [fuscialadybug@netzero.net](mailto:fuscialadybug@netzero.net))

**The Bi Health Summit**—part of the LGBTI Health Summit—will be on August 14, 2009 in Chicago, IL. To submit a proposal, register to participate, volunteer to prepare for the Summit, or for info, please visit [www.2009lgbtihealth.org](http://www.2009lgbtihealth.org) and click the "Bi Health Summit" tab.

**Transcending Boundaries** is excited to announce planning for our 6th conference, and we need YOU to help make it happen! TBC focuses on the bisexual, intersex, polyamorous and transgender communities, and welcomes all those whose sex, gender and/or sexuality don't fit society's usual either/or categories. Never felt like you quite fit in? Transcending Boundaries might be for you!

We hope to hold the conference somewhere in the Northeastern US in either late 2009 or 2010, and need organizers and volunteers of all talents and experience levels to make this happen! While we definitely need local volunteers, help from a distance is also welcome. Whether you've chaired cons before or never volunteered in your life, you can make a difference and have a great time doing it by being a part of TBC! We are looking for volunteers and organizers from outside the box! If you'd like more info or are interested in getting involved, please contact Lisa at [transcendingboundaries@gmail.com](mailto:transcendingboundaries@gmail.com).



## Bi Woman of the Month: Dina Perrone

**L**isa Silveria, our last Bi Woman of the Month, interviews Dina Perrone in this issue. Dina is... read the interview and find out!

**Lisa Silveria:** Dina, we've been friends now for just over a year, though it seems like ages ago when we first met. You really are one of my dearest friends, and to think—we met online. I was relatively new to the area and you were about to move to Boston from New York. I was hoping to make some friendships other than with the young people I interact with every day and you were looking to make some connections before you moved to a new city. We couldn't stop talking the first evening we met in person, and quickly became friends. It was refreshing for me to have such a wonderful friend who was also bi. I know you felt similarly. Would you care to discuss why it was important for you to have a bi female friend?

**Dina Perrone:** Interestingly, I recently had a similar conversation with another bi female friend. She was complaining that her straight best friend just did not grasp the relationship problems with which she was dealing. Often, those who are not bi do not really understand the confusion or the issues bi people face. Many stereotypes and assumptions surround bis in general and bi women in particular. It is nice to have a friend with whom you can share and with whom you relate.

**LS:** While you came out to your mom years ago, you only recently came out to your father. I know you were particularly nervous about coming out to him. Can you tell us about this experience?

**DP:** I was very fortunate to have the coming out experience about which many dream. When I first told my brother that I was going to finally come out to our dad, he pressured me to wait. I could not wait any longer. It was time. My brother assured me he would help in any way that he could. Our father has quite a short temper and upsets easily. My brother created an extensive plan that would prevent, well at least would neutralize, an explosion. My brother, mother and I were certain that my dad would not take it well. My brother and I reviewed the extremely likely course of events: 1) I tell my dad. 2) He is furious. 3) I take my grandmother (who lives with them) to the store to escape the rage. 4) My brother arrives at our parents' home to put out the fire (i.e., talk to my dad and help him put things in perspective). 5) I would return to the house, and everything would be great. This plan was ingenious.

When the day arrived, my mother was very nervous, but very glad that she would be working and, hence, inaccessible and far away from the events. By mid-afternoon, my brother was in position, and I was ready. After a lot of procrastinating and with much fear and hesitation, I told my father that I am bisexual. He said, "okay." Confused by his calm, even nonexistent, reaction, I asked if he knew what that meant. He accurately defined it, and said he kind of knew that about me. He stressed that it is going to be very difficult for me, as most are not tolerant. And, because of that, he worried. He gave me a hug, and told me that he loved me.

Goodness, just saying it now brings tears to my eyes. It was absolutely perfect.

I phoned my brother and mother to relay the amazing news, and inform them that the plan was not necessary. My brother thought I was kidding, and then, suggested that perhaps it did not

really sink into our father's head. He eventually came over to the house. Our father was fine. My mother was equally shocked and suspicious, but relieved. She indicated that sometimes my father really surprises us. She was absolutely right.

**LS:** That's amazing. I suppose we should never underestimate the ones who love us. Do you have any advice for our readers who might be thinking about coming out to their loved ones?

**DP:** I recommend having a strong support group who can talk you through it, and can be there for you throughout the process.

**LS:** When you casually came out to your mother years ago, her reaction was one that many of us might be familiar with. Can you tell us about her reaction, as well as your feelings and response to her reaction?

**DP:** When I came out to my mother, she exclaimed, "I always wanted to be a grandmother." I told her not to fret, since I wanted to be a mother. Still, she does not really talk about it.

**LS:** I know your roommates' dog and children are keeping your motherly desires occupied at the moment, but at our age our biological clock often starts ticking its loudest (I know mine is). What are your current thoughts (or plans if you have any) about parenthood?

**DP:** I want to have a child—maybe two. Since I am getting older and, you are right, that clock is ticking, I would like to have a child within the next few years. I know that could mean that I would be doing it without a partner. I am okay with that; I actually think—while tough—it would be great. The most important factor is having some support—family or friends. Two of my friends and I often discuss the possibility of getting a place together and helping each other raise our children. Oddly, in a recent New York Times Magazine article, the author discussed a group of women who do just that. It was quite comforting for us.

**LS:** The theme of the previous issue of Bi Women was "Children in our lives." This of course isn't limited to our own children, but is open to all children in our lives. You are godmother to a number of children. Would you be interested in telling us a little about these beautiful (I've seen pictures!) children and your relationship with them?

**DP:** I am very fortunate to have three godchildren—Hali, Gabriella, and Fausto. They are so cute and so sweet. I take my godparenting responsibilities very seriously. While I am still not really sure if there are any particular responsibilities, I want to, and try to, be a part of their lives. Unfortunately, we do not live in the same state, so I do not get to visit and play with them as much as I would like. But, with the Internet and webcams, I am able to see them quite regularly. They are wonderful.

**LS:** Any final thoughts?

**DP:** Thank you for being an awesome bi female friend.



## The "Bi Office"

is the Bisexual Resource Center, located at 29 Stanhope Street, behind Club Cafe. For info call 617-424-9595.

### Ongoing Events

#### Last Fridays:

**Bi Women's Rap**, 7:30-9:00 p.m. at the Cambridge Women's Center, 46 Pleasant St., Cambridge. For info and discussion topics call 617-354-8807.

#### 2nd Mondays:

**Straight Marriage, Still Questioning**. Email kate.e.flynn@gmail.com for more info.

#### 1st Wednesdays, 3rd Thursdays:

**BLISS: Bisexual Support & Social Group**, 7-8:45 p.m. The group meets at the Bisexual Resource Center at 29 Stanhope St. in Boston. Call 617-424-9595 for info.

#### 3rd Saturdays:

**Biversity Brunch**, 11:30 a.m. at Johnny D's, Davis Square, Somerville.

*Sign up for our new email list! Send an email to: biwomenboston-subscribe@yahoo.com*



# CALENDAR

## March

**Wednesday, March 4, 7-8:45 p.m. Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS).** Meets 1st Wednesdays and 3rd Thursdays at the Boston Living Center, 29 Stanhope Street, Boston. All bi and bi-friendly people of all genders and orientations are welcome to attend. 1st Wednesday meetings are peer facilitated discussion groups, sometimes with a pre-selected topic or presenter. 3rd Thursday meetings are 7-8 p.m. check-ins, discussion, and announcements followed by social time at a nearby restaurant. Only want to socialize? Meet the group at or shortly after 8 p.m. in the lobby of the Boston Living Center.

**Friday, March 6-Sunday, March 8. Bi-inclusive National Lesbian Health Summit in San Francisco.** For more details, visit [www.lesbianhealthinfo.org/NationalLesbianHealthSummit](http://www.lesbianhealthinfo.org/NationalLesbianHealthSummit).

**Monday, March 9, 7 p.m. Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** A peer-led support group for women in a straight marriage/relationship struggling with sexual orientation or coming out. If interested in attending, contact kate.e.flynn@gmail.com. Meets 2nd Mondays.

**Tuesday, March 10, 7:00-9:00 p.m. Bisexual Resource Center Board Meeting.** All bi and bi-friendly community members welcome to attend. Email Ellyn at nellythrustmor@comcast.net for more info. At the Boston Living Center, 29 Stanhope St. near Back Bay station on the Orange Line.

**Thursday, March 12-Saturday, March 14. True Colors Conference (for LG-BTQIA Youth)** in Storrs, Connecticut. More info at [www.ourtruecolors.org](http://www.ourtruecolors.org).

**Friday, March 13, 7:30, Mouthful: An Open Mic for Open Minds**, Center for New Words, 7 Temple Street, Cambridge. Meets 2nd Fridays to turn the mic over to your original writing in any genre, and munch on tasty noshes while you chat informally about writing and whatever else comes to mind. Come to read or come to

listen: the goal is to build a community of writers and readers that supports women and their allies. \$5 donation requested.

**Saturday, March 14, 2-4 p.m. Monthly meeting of the Boston branch of the national organization Blind Friends, Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgender People (BFLAG).** Meets at Club Café, 209 Columbus Ave, Boston 2nd Saturdays. Are you a GLBT person who is visually impaired? Are you a friend of a GLBT person who is visually impaired? The national organization's aim is to provide mutual support, to provide information about sources of information in formats useable by visually-impaired GLBT, and to encourage inclusion of those with visual impairments in the activities and programs offered to sighted GLBT persons.

**Thursday, March 19, 7 p.m. Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS).** (See March 4<sup>th</sup>)

**Saturday, March 21, 11:30am. Bi Brunch.** Bi Brunch (a mixed gender bi group) is now always the 3rd Saturday at Johnny D's on Holland St. in Davis Sq. in Somerville.

**Saturday, March 21, BBWN Potluck Brunch**, hello spring" brunch at Steph's in Arlington at noon. This lunch is being co-hosted by Steph Miserlis and Deb Morley. Please bring a potluck dish or drinks to share. Contact Steph at smiserlis@gmail.com or 781-859-5959. A great opportunity to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the Boston area.

**Tuesday, March 24, 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. Boundless/Fenway: Become A Moving Target: How Big Tobacco and Alcohol Target the LBT Community.** Dinner 6:30 p.m. Presentation 7-8:00 p.m. Come join Andrea Quijada of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project for a presentation that will rock your socially active socks into action. Come hear the truth about how the tobacco and alcohol industries are targeting

**CALENDAR** continues on page 15



## Bye Bi Labels

by B.J. Epstein

“I’m...” And it’s here in the sentence that I freeze. I am something, but what?

I am a woman who has loved women, a woman who has loved men. I am a person who sometimes feels, dresses, and acts butch, and sometimes feels, dresses, and acts femme. I am someone who enjoys being in-between, who wants to live in and explore the gray areas.

Is bisexual the best word to use to describe myself? I can’t think of anything better, at least not now, so I use it. I introduce myself as bisexual, because I am attracted to people, across gender lines, and “bisexual” comes closest to explaining that. Similarly, I can call myself bilingual, because I am a translator who uses two languages on a daily basis. And yet I never feel fully bilingual; I know that my skills in one language will always be better than those in the other. Also, I strive to be bicultural, because I live outside my native country and must understand

B.J. continues on page 12

## Not Bisexual Enough?

by Tracy

I have a confession to make. I need to come out of yet another closet. Presently, I identify as bisexual. Yet... I feel that my identity as such is a technicality. This is because while my attraction to men is present, most of the time I am much more attracted to women. In reality, I lean way toward the lesbian end of the Kinsey scale. I wonder if a different label would be a better fit for me. There, I said it. Shall I turn in my bisexual membership card now, along with the bi pride flag and other memorabilia? Am I bisexual enough?

Allow me to tell my story. One fine autumn, when I recognized the beginnings of yet another “intense friendship” with a girl, I decided that it was time to settle the question of my sexual orientation once and for all. (I assumed, in my arrogance, that such a thing

Tracy continues on page 13

## BECAUSE We Said So

by Ellyn Ruthstrom

Why do bisexuals like to gather together and discuss issues about our identity, culture, families, activism, sex and more? BECAUSE!

The Bisexual Empowerment Conference: A Uniting Supportive Experience was held April 17-19 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. At the 15th such gathering (it hasn’t been held in 15 consecutive years so it’s not the 15th annual), organizers reported that this year’s 200 attendees made for the largest BECAUSE so far. Besides a wonderful group of Minnesota folks, there were participants from Wisconsin, the Dakotas, California, Illinois, Montana, New York and more. Plus, Steph Miserlis and I represented the Bisexual Resource Center, and Robyn Ochs was the keynote speaker on Friday, so Massachusetts was in the house as well.

Robyn’s speech on Friday night kicked off the weekend with a great spirit of sharing and pride. After discussing the importance of being visible and constructively engaging the negative ways that bisexuals are still portrayed, Robyn opened up the floor to the audience to talk to each other about personal ways they can claim positive space for bisexuals and work together. It was a very moving and creative exchange that enabled the group to get a sense of who they’d be sharing workshop and food-line conversations with over the following few days.

It’s always difficult to assess an entire conference because everyone’s experience can be so different, depending on what

BECAUSE continues on page 8



Hanging out at BECAUSE. Goup includes conference chairs Kim Jorgensen (top left) and Becky Saltzman (bottom right).



## HONOR ROLL

*Deb Morley,  
Ellyn Ruthstrom,  
Lisa Silveria,  
Tracy,  
Peg Preble,  
Cynthia Connors,  
Emily Meghan  
Morrow Howe,  
Gail Zacharias,  
Robyn Ochs,  
Katelynn Bishop  
& immeasurable  
amount of thanks  
to Justin Adkins  
for designing the  
Bi WomenBoston  
website  
(biwomenboston.  
org) for us!*

And many more  
fabulous people!  
You know who  
you are!

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**Robyn Ochs**

Arts & Culture  
Editor:  
**Lisa Silveria**

Calendar Editor:  
**Ellyn Ruthstrom**

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## From your editor

The theme of this issue is "LABELS." The explosion in recent years of different labels onto the identity scene has been both a challenge and a delight. Ellyn's list on page 5 contains enough of these to give you a taste of some of the labels that are out there. Accompanying this explosion of labels – and in part causing it – has been more critical attention paid to older labels: first the Big Binary: straight and gay; then later the Big Four: lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

When all this started happening, I first felt annoyed. How could this be happening?—I sometimes felt—after so many of us have worked so hard to make it POSSIBLE to identify as bisexual. Why don't people just call themselves bi? I mean, come ON! Step over here into OUR box, darn it! But the bottom line is this: It's not ours to control anyway. We don't have the power or the right to control what other people do or don't decide to call themselves. Rather, it's incumbent upon us to listen to what other people are saying and to enter into respectful dialogue, to figure out what are our common goals, and to move forward TOGETHER into the future and to the next level of liberation.

We offer five pieces about labels in this issue, written by Ellyn, Tracy, B.J., Lindsay and Cara.

In addition, we offer other delights: a beautiful poem by N.K., interviews with two bi-identified writers, news in brief and a write-up of the BECAUSE Conference, which was held in Minneapolis/St. Paul. Our "Bis Around the World" column takes us to Pune, India, and of course we offer our fabulous calendar of events in the Boston area.

Remember, ladies: this is YOUR newsletter. Please consider supporting us with your dollars (if you have any), and please consider writing something for the next issue!

Bi for now,  
Robyn

## Next in Bi Women

The theme for the Fall 2009 issue:

### VISIBILITY

What are the benefits and costs of being visible as bisexual? How are we made (in)visible in the media? through language? through assumptions? How do you make personal decisions about when it matters to be visible, and when it doesn't. How can we be visible?

Let's talk about VISIBILITY.

Deadline: August 10, 2009

Upcoming themes will include:

The Youth Issue; Trans/Gender; Fantasy; Choice; Out at Work; and more.

Send your suggestions for future topics to  
[biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com)

## Submit to Bi Women!

Send articles, calendar entries, letters, poems, black-and-white art, news, and views to:

**Bi Women**

P.O. Box 301727

Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

or via e-mail to  
[biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com)

If you do not want your name published, or wish to use a pseudonym, please tell us.

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The Boston Bisexual Women's Network is a feminist, not-for-profit collective organization whose purpose is to bring women together for support and validation. It is meant to be a safe environment in which women of all sexual self-identities, class backgrounds, racial, ethnic and religious groups, ages, abilities and disabilities are welcome. Through the vehicles of discussion, support, education, outreach, political action and social groups related to bisexuality, we are committed to the goals of full acceptance as bisexuals within the gay and lesbian community, and to full acceptance of bisexuality and the liberation of all gay and transgender people within the larger society.



## Bis Around the World: Apphia K. in Pune, India

by Robyn Ochs

Apphia is one of the amazing individuals who responded to a call for writing for the second edition of *Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World*. If, after reading this interview, you are as impressed by Apphia as I am, you can read more about her in *Getting Bi*.

**Robyn Ochs:** Apphia, please tell us about yourself.

**Apphia K:** My name is Apphia, I was born in Dubai raised between there and mostly in India. I have just moved back home to live closer to my parents. I work in the music retail industry, currently as a manager. My passions are music, literature, cooking, driving, exploring cultures and doing quite a few things I don't seem to have the time to do. I mostly network with local musicians and performers and put business and the art together on different levels. I'd love any job in the music field. The industry in India is growing fast and I'm right where it's happening and loving every minute of it! I write in my spare time, though I usually just keep my compositions to myself or show them only to close friends. I intend on someday putting my works together and publishing it. Let's see how that goes.

**RO:** Tell briefly the story of your coming out as bi. How did you become aware that you were bi? How old were you?



Who did you tell? What happened?

**AK:** It was actually very accidental. No one but my first girlfriend knew that I was queer. Christmas of '07 I let it slip in front of my sister, her husband and a couple of cousins that I am bisexual. Unlike my cousins, my sister was very cool about it—I guess on some level she must've already known. She is supportive of me, although she did double check to make sure that this wasn't "just a phase." We're closer now. I came out to my mother for the second time last year. I had told her I was gay when I was 17, but she was in denial and I just let that slip. Now that I just turned 24, which is "coming of age" in Indian society, my mum has started talking about me settling down. It's a slow process of allowing her into my life again as a bisexual, letting her know that I'm still the same person she's come to know me to be, and being clear that I don't need a man to make me want to settle down. It might even be a woman and that it would be okay. Not easy, but okay. Our relationship is much better now, with all the honesty going around. Its brilliant!! I still have to come all the way out to my father, although I think on some level, he knows. I'm out to my friends, many of them left but some stayed. Its not the easiest, but the ones who have stuck with me have made it a little bit easier.

**RO:** What is your religious background, and what impact does this have on your life, and particularly on your comfort/discomfort with coming out and being out?

**AK:** I was brought up in a family of staunch Christians. I studied a lot of Wicca, and learned that spirituality is a learning experience that never

ends. Wicca actually helped me understand myself as a woman and come to terms with my sexuality. Now, I just go with the flow and feel what I feel, bad or good, and trust that no matter what I will always have the strength to deal with whatever comes my way in this life. And above all, unconditional love is divine. Right now, that fits perfectly with the "Love knows no Gender" part of being me!

**RO:** When did you first become a bisexual/gay rights activist, and what caused you to get involved?

**AK:** Coming out! I didn't know that it was important, I didn't know it was something that had to be done. I just wanted other women in my circle, in my community to know that there's always someone to come talk to, even if its only myself.

**RO:** What resources are available for bisexuals in India (or specifically around Bangalore)?

**AK:** There are e-groups, and Bangalore, Bombay and Delhi have communities where people come together in person. These are mostly for gay men and/or lesbians and transgendered people. I haven't yet found a community mainly for bisexuals. We're usually bundled up with the queens or the dykes. I know of four bisexuals in the whole country..

**RO:** You recently went to your first pride parade, which was the first ever in Bangalore. What was it like?

*Apphia K., continues on page 12*



## A Resistance to Labels

by Lindsay Maddox Pratt

I am not a lesbian. I repeat: I am not a lesbian. This fact, however, is apparently difficult to understand. People are continually referring to me as a lesbian however often I tell them that is not how I identify. I understand that I look like a typical San Francisco lesbian—if there is such a thing as a typical San Francisco anything—with short hair, hipsterish men's clothes, tattoos and piercings. So for people who are accustomed to having their perceptions of things be a reliable way to categorize, I can see why I might cause confusion. Personally, I do not believe in making assumptions about people's identities based on what we perceive. And indeed, I enjoy pushing people to question this habit that we all unfortunately have. I am not a fan of clear-cut categories or boxes, and I do my best to live outside of them. I'm the type that checks "other" and fills in the "please clarify" space on nearly every form that I encounter. Yes, statisticians—I am your worst nightmare. But most people will come to conclusions about my identity before I have a chance to even say "hello," let alone share with them the nuances of my unique sexual identity. Besides, the majority of people like labels; they give a feeling of familiarity. We have a sense that we know what a lesbian is, or what a gay man is, or even what

a man or woman is and therefore if we know that, we then know something about the person. So here I am, someone who can't stand labels in a world that likes to label, trying to find a way to explain who and what I am without giving a lecture every time someone asks. So what label would work for label-resistant me?

As I said before, I am not a lesbian. It's true that I date women (mostly) and am female-bodied, but in order for me to be a lesbian I would also have to identify as female, which I do not. So yeah, a big X crossing out that choice. But since I don't really identify as male, "straight" doesn't describe me either. What about when I am dating a boy, am I then a gay boi? Since I don't believe that there are only two genders, and have been in relationships with more than two, the label "bisexual" doesn't fit either. And "omnisexual" sounds a bit too scientific for my taste. So this leaves me with the choice that I so often choose: queer.

I love this word: queer. I use it all the time, and, after its long history of being used as a slur, I am more than happy to give it a loving home in my lexicon. Queer. Say it again: queer. It just sounds so sexy to me. It is a label that I can embrace fully, with no qualms. While most people confuse it with being synonymous with gay/lesbian, a common definition is simply "not straight." Which is exactly what I am—not straight. Some people take it even further and say that it means

"not hetero," implying not belonging to the hetero-normative. It is the label for those who dislike labels. Queer.

Yet, as with every label, it is imperfect. The problem with "queer" is that I still end up having to explain myself. I will tell people, "I'm queer," and then they invariably end up referring to me as a lesbian. And we are back at square one, with me exclaiming: "No, I'm not a lesbian; I'm queer." They get glazed looks on their faces, and depending on my energy level and the aptitude of the individuals in question, I explain my identity and what queer means to me.

What queer means to me. Perhaps this is the key. Maybe labels are as fluid and changing as the identities that they attempt to classify; only we fail to see this because we neglect to ask. What if instead of accepting our own understanding of the meaning of a word, we inquired into another person's experience of it? How much would we learn about each other? About ourselves? What if the feeling of familiarity that labels lend is just an illusion? Maybe it is not even about asking, but about actually listening and being flexible when we discover that our definition of something may not be universal. And maybe if we realized this, I would stop having to repeat myself so often and could move on to sharing other aspects of my fabulous, unique self. So what does your identity mean to you?

*Lindsay lives in San Francisco and studies Psychology and Queer Studies at City College of San Francisco. Ze has many interests, including acting and poetry.*

### Brunch Coordinator Invites You to Host

BBWN potluck brunches are a great way to meet other bi women in the Boston area. We try to hold a brunch in a member's home each month so that people can relax and share food and experiences in a safe space. Deb Morley is the brunch coordinator, so please contact her at debmo345@gmail.com if you are interested in hosting a brunch. And check out the calendar on pages 15-16 for upcoming activities. We hope you can join us.

### Do You Know Web Design?

We're looking for someone to get biwomenboston.org, our new website, up and running. If you are interested, please contact Robyn: biwomeneditor@gmail.com. It's the perfect volunteer job, as you can do it from home, in your pajamas, or even in your birthday suit.



## What's in a Name: Call Me Bisexual or Call Me...

by Ellyn Ruthstrom

As the current President of an organization that identifies itself with the b-word, the Bisexual Resource Center, I've been becoming increasingly aware of the fact that the word bisexual is not the descriptor of choice of many people whose experiences are similar to people who do identify as bisexual. So I took the opportunity to ask a whole bunch of people who went to a conference with bisexual in the title (BECAUSE, see article on page 1) to ask them more about how they identify and see if we can all work together even if we call ourselves different things. The title of the workshop was the same as the title of this article. It turned into a fascinating discussion.

Something that I have found to be true of many bisexuals is that we hate to be labeled. Yeah, I know, everybody says they hate labels, but bisexuals really seem to have a deep aversion to the whole concept. Being boxed into a word is as fear provoking as being boxed into a monosexual world. A label suggests that what you are describing is static enough to enable you to determine its characteristics and it won't change enough to merit another label. How could that be true... or even desired...of your sexuality? How could you know who in your lifetime will turn you on, will open you up to true intimacy, will be able to understand you and all your flaws? There is something about a bisexual mindset that resists prediction of cause and effect, and immediately senses the inadequacy of any word to simultaneously explain something and allow ambiguity to persist.

Wow, that was a little off the track of where I was going, but I kind of agree with myself so I'll leave it at that.

I kicked off the workshop by having the 30 or so people there shout out the various words they use to describe their sexuality.

*95/5 girl - lesbian-identified bisexual - genderqueer - ambisexual - sexual - no label - AC/DC - pomosexual - trans - heterosexual - homoflexible - queer - pansexual - fembi - bisexual - tomboy - open - heteroflexible - trysexual - omnisexual*

It was interesting to see the variety of terms mentioned. Some people shared their identity paths, noting that different experiences in their lives prompted them to need a different word to describe themselves. Sometimes the way they defined themselves was determined by whom they were talking to, depending on what the other person understood and how much educating they felt like doing at that moment.

One person brought up how she had become uncomfortable describing herself as bisexual after having a relationship with a transgender person and coming to a different understanding of sex and gender. If she didn't believe there were only two sexes, how could she use a term that has "bi" or "two" in it? Several folks nodded in agreement.

This was finally what I was hoping to get at. In the last few years a schism has developed—especially between younger people and with those who have identified as bisexual for a number of years—about how "bi" does not encompass the reality of there being more than two sexes. An awareness of transgender issues has become much more prevalent all around, but especially with younger people, and they want to reflect that different understanding in their choice of language.

Here's one of the issues that I brought into our discussion: Older

bisexuals followed their own paths of discovery and found comfort and passion for a term that opened up a supportive community with which to identify. It's difficult to use a term to describe yourself for a long time and then be told you really should call yourself something else. (I'm simplifying this, but it can feel that way.)

Meanwhile, it's a very "natural" (using the term lightly) thing for younger people to want to find their own language to describe their experiences and to want to distinguish themselves from the older generations. New information and experiences inform their identity development and they come up with different choices of words and meaning. They aren't attached to the same words, so they can come up with something fresh and exciting.

Both of these perspectives were present in the room that day and are very much a part of our community discussions right now. Both perspectives are valid. So then the next question is, if we call ourselves by different names can we still build a movement together? If an organization such as the Bisexual Resource Center uses the term bisexual in its name will it turn people who use different identity labels off to it?

Tenured activist bis definitely hope that we can successfully build the bridge to unite us all. We've worked for over 25 years to create organizations, community, and culture that nurtures and respects the types of lives we choose to live. We really want to pass along the structures that we have built up to

Name, continues on page 14



# Words Matter: An Interview with Author Beth Wylde

by Lara Zielinsky

Words matter. Writing our stories and putting them out there for others to read builds bridges of understanding. Exceptional authors open doors and windows, inviting in the wider community to see our lives.

Beth Wylde is such a writer. She lives in the "Wylde's" of Virginia with her husband and three young children. During the day she's a mild mannered mother and housewife but at night she lets her imagination take flight. Beth can usually be found in front of her computer, doing promo, chatting or typing away on her next story in genres that range from paranormal romance to lesbian erotica and beyond. She's been writing for years but only recently decided to submit her stories to be published. Her first release was in April of 2006, so she's fairly new to the business, but her reviews have been top notch. She received Romance Erotica Connection's 2008 F/F Author of the Year award, one of the few times it has gone to a writer of lesbian or bi-women stories.

Beth and I met through the online group Sapphic Planet and were crazy enough to go in together on editing an anthology project. Between our busy schedules, I recently spoke with Beth to discover what makes her tick, what brings her to write about women loving women, the politics of bisexuality and beyond.

**Lara Zielinsky:** How long have you been writing? How long did you write before you found publication? What got you started?

**Beth Wylde:** I've been writing for as long as I can remember. My first love was poetry and then I moved on to song lyrics in junior high and then short stories by the time I was in high school. Literature was my favorite subject and I never fussed about having to read a book or do a report. I'm a bit of a nerd. ^\_^ I got serious with my writing while I was pregnant with my first daughter, it became a way to

pass the time when I got put on bed rest for preterm labor. After the birth, things got put on hold for a bit but on a whim I sent off the story to a friend of mine and she said, "You should send this in to a publisher," and gave me a few recommendations. It took about a year once I started submitting to get my first acceptance letter and the book came out six months later, in early 2006. I write daily now, even if it's just for ten or fifteen minutes.

**LZ:** What genres do you write, and do you have a preference?

**BW:** I write what I like to read, which is a little bit of everything. Most of my books are either contemporary or paranormal in genre. I love sci-fi and fantasy too. They all contain erotic content and the pairings can vary as well. I've written a bit of it all.

**LZ:** What comes first for you? Character or plot? How do you build a story?

**BW:** Character is always first, without knowing my characters' descriptions and names my story goes nowhere. Then I usually get the idea for the beginning of the story and the rest

unfolds as I write. I cannot plot or outline: my storyline always veers off track when I try. My characters are as stubborn as I am and that's really saying something.

**LZ:** What from your own life makes it most often into your stories?

**BW:** Lots of my characters are based on people I know and most of my lead female characters tend to get a lot of my own personality traits, especially the stubbornness and the independence. In this day and age women have to be able to handle anything that comes their way. Women do not have to be wimpy. A strong female is a big turn on.

**LZ:** What's your experience of being a B in the GLBT community?

**BW:** There is just so much prejudice in the world. Why shouldn't we all be free to love who we want to? I just don't understand it. Slowly and surely changes are being made, some for the good and some for the bad. It's a constant struggle.

**LZ:** Most writers are voracious readers. Introduce us to a few of your favorites.

*Wylde continues on next page*





**BW:** OMG! Where should I start? My bedroom looks more like a library than a place to sleep and I'm quickly running out of space for any more bookshelves. I like anything with a bit of paranormal and erotic flavor to it, especially the vamps and the shifters. Pairing doesn't matter. I'll read it all. Laurell K. Hamilton, Kim Harrison, Cassandra Gold (who also co writes the Shaun and Adam stories and critiques for me), Syd McGinley, Mychael Black, D. L. King, Jolie du Pre, I'm sure I've left out at least a hundred or more names but this is what came to me off the top of my head.

**LZ:** What three words do you think describe you as a human being?

**BW:** Outgoing, compassionate, hardworking.

**LZ:** How do you think others would describe you?

**BW:** My closest friends would tell you I'm the person that always tries to cheer them up and make them laugh. I hate to see people when they are sad.

**LZ:** What you are most passionate about outside of writing?

**BW:** My children. They mean the world to me.

**LZ:** How does your family react to your writing? Are they supportive? What about friends?

**BW:** My family is clueless and that's probably for the best. I get my support for my writing from my friends. My critique partner is also fabulous too. My friends always ask me when the next book is coming out and they are online to order it on release day. Several of them have already promised

me a trip to the bookstore in February when my first print book comes out. It should be fun but probably a bit of a scene too. My best friend wants to give her girlfriend a signed copy of one of my books for Christmas. You can't ask for better support than that.

**LZ:** Tell us about your family situation. Why is it "for the best" they don't know what you write?

**BW:** Yes, they know I write, and to some extent they know that the subject matter is adult in nature but that's as far as it goes. S-E-X was a dirty word in my house growing up so the less my parents – especially my mom – knows about my books, the better off I am. My husband takes it in stride, he's not thrilled about it but he sees it as my hobby so he deals with it. My kids are too young to understand. It's my friends that give me the support I need to continue reaching for my goal of one day making a living off my writing.

**LZ:** What's coming up from you? Describe new projects or recent releases.

**BW:** 2009 is going to be a big year for me and I'm so excited about each and every project in the works that I'm not sure where to start. 2009 marks the release of my first ever print book, coming from Phaze, in early February. It's a four author erotic lesbian anthology. I'm also working on assembling a BDSM GLBT-themed series of books with some of the best BDSM GLBT authors in the business. (These books are going to be huge!!) My most recent release, *A Little Taste of Red*, is a werewolf themed novella and my first release so far that is straight het in pairing.

I run several yahoo groups, one is a critique group for authors of any genre or pairing, another (Sapphic



Planet) is strictly for lesbian fiction authors and then my own personal group (bethwylde) is for both readers and authors of everything under the sun! It seems like I'm constantly working on something and that's good I think because a bored writer is a jobless writer.

*Beth's stories with bisexual women and bisexuality themes:*

\*\* *The Big 4-OH!* The lead female character and her best friend are bi.

\*\* "Caught in the Act," part of the *Swing!* anthology from *Logical Lust* and edited by Jolie du Pre. "My main female character is bi and refuses to admit the truth to herself and her husband until he makes her come to terms with her own desires and needs."

For more information on Beth and her writings, visit Beth's website: [www.bethwylde.com](http://www.bethwylde.com)

*Lara Zielinsky is the author of "Turning Point", and a 2007 Golden Crown Literary Society Finalist for Debut Author. Her latest project is "Readings in Les and Bi Women's Erotic Fiction" airing bi-weekly on Blog Talk Radio. For more information visit her website, [www.lzfiction.net](http://www.lzfiction.net)*



BECAUSE, continued from page 1

workshops you go to and who you engage with. From my own experience and from the reactions of those I spoke to, there were many epiphanies and uplifting moments going on all over the Student Union at the University of Minnesota that weekend.

One of my own highlights was learning more about the Bi Cities cable television program that is produced in Minneapolis/St. Paul. Just a few talented folks have kept this bi-centered program on the air for seven years. The all-volunteer crew discussed how they produce the show and shared some video with the audience, which highlighted the tremendous array of guests they have interviewed over the years. Check them out at [bicities.org](http://bicities.org).

All work and no play? Never at a bi conference. For lunch on Saturday, we were entertained by a one-woman performance of Fluid: a personal exploration of "bi"-sexuality. Performed by Erika Kate MacDonald,

the short piece delved into a personal odyssey of discovery through short vignettes and music. And for the evening's entertainment, the lovely Janessa Jaye Champagne of Grand Forks, ND held court for the open mike. From light acoustic rock to drag kings and queens to bellydancing, the stage was a constant source of amusement. I doubt that I will ever again see a drag king sing to a hand puppet...to Meatloaf's "Paradise by the Dashboard Light"!!

Sunday was the time to say our goodbyes and thank all the volunteers for the tremendous work they put into making BECAUSE a lively success. The group was treated to a showing of the documentary *Bi the Way*, and the director Josephine Decker talked to the audience afterwards. The film offers

some great slices of life about current bi identity, and Decker announced that it will be showing on Logo in the near future. Check out [bithewaymovie.com](http://bithewaymovie.com) for more deets.



Janessa Jaye Champaign and Robyn Ochs

Dorsey, continued from page 11

it didn't matter. Whereas in the 70s, people just assumed a male gender for a space ship captain, for instance, and said, "oh, he must be gay", without really reading the text.

But I didn't sit down and say, "What activist necessity should drive my fiction today?" That's where the "no" part of the answer comes in. I think we have to be very careful not to sit down with a primary agenda of activism when writing fiction and poetry. These are associative not prescriptive art forms, and the activism in them comes from the author's implanted worldview.

In a Robert McKee Story Workshop I attended, he said, "Theme is the writerly perspective on the significance of the story." I use this quote with my writing students to explain why they

should ignore the idea of "thinking of a theme," but should concentrate on the people in the story, and the story they are living. Whatever we believe will come out in our writing, and we don't have to belabour the point and impoverish the writing by doing so. It is probably better to operate as a fiction writer and/or a poet from a place of passion rather than a place of reason. And I will add: as soon as I make a categorical statement like this someone comes along to refute it with a great piece of writing, so take that into consideration too as you consider this conversation!

MM: Thanks, Candas, for your time and your thought-provoking responses. I wish I had more space: there's so much more to talk about!

Monica Meneghetti is a poly-genre writer who recently added literary translation to her repertoire. She is an MFA candidate in Creative Writing at the University of British Columbia. Visit Monica at [www.monicameneghetti.com](http://www.monicameneghetti.com).





## NEWS BRIEFS

### Majority of Mass. Legislators Co-sponsor An Act Relative to Gender-Based Discrimination and Hate Crimes

104 of 200 Massachusetts legislators have signed on as co-sponsors of this bill which will prohibit gender-based discrimination and protect transgender people in Massachusetts. Please go to [www.masstpc.org](http://www.masstpc.org), find out how your legislator voted, thank them if they have signed on as sponsors, and ask them to vote for the bill if they have not. Help make Massachusetts a full equality state.

## MARRIAGE!

Here's where we are: Six months ago, Massachusetts was the *only* U.S. state with marriage equality. As of May 2009, there are 5: MA, CT, VT, IA, and ME. NH is poised to become the 6th. A tipping point, perhaps?

And in case you're feeling lonely: Norway and Sweden have joined the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Canada, and South Africa as marriage equality countries, bringing that total to 7.



*Tracy, continued from page 13*

girl-on-girl porn, people who are mostly attracted to the same sex, people who are mostly attracted to the opposite sex, those who are attracted to people "regardless of gender," and so many more. Clearly, there is a demand for many more labels, but what do we do until then?

Perhaps it would be best if we all followed the advice of my father: "Stop worrying about what to label yourself. Just do what makes you happy!"

Now, if only I could believe that!

*Tracy works as an engineer near Boston. Her hobbies include reading, performing in a local concert band, surfing the Internet, and cooking.*

## THE POWER OF THE PRESS

Has anyone noticed that Rachel Maddow, Keith Olbermann, Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert have been championing our causes? They've taken on Don't Ask Don't Tell, marriage equality and more.

One of my favorite clips was Stephen Colbert's send-off of the National Organization for Marriage's "A Storm is Coming" anti-equality ad that hired paid [very bad!] actors to woodenly predict that gay marriage is threatening Christian values. Colbert described the original ad as "like watching the 700 Club and the Weather Channel at the same time."

And Rachel Maddow has taken full aim at Don't Ask Don't Tell, with poignant interviews of individuals who have been discharged from the military for coming out as gay.



For those of you who are not already hooked, Rachel Maddow and Keith Olbermann have shows on MSNBC; and Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert are on Comedy Central. Maddow is an out and proud—and VERY, VERY hot—lesbian.

## Please send in news stories

IF YOU SEE SOMETHING THAT YOU THINK IS BI-NEWSWORTHY, PLEASE WRITE ABOUT IT AND SEND IT IN!

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN DOING A QUARTERLY COLUMN FOR BI WOMEN, WRITE TO ROBYN AT [BIWOMENEDITOR@GMAIL.COM](mailto:BIWOMENEDITOR@GMAIL.COM).



# Candas Jane Dorsey: Sexuality, Life & Literature

by Monica Meneghetti



Photo by Beth Gwinn

Candas Jane Dorsey

Integrating one's sexual identity with a writing life has its challenges. So, I thought I'd seek the wisdom of other bi writers, starting with Candas Jane Dorsey.

Candas is an award-winning, multi-genre writer from Edmonton, Canada. She is also an educator, editor, and past publisher of The Books Collective, River Books, and Tesseract Books. She contributes to her community as a member of the Advisory Committee to the Edmonton Police Service, which addresses the issue of hate and bias crimes. She's served on the executive of the Writers' Guild of Alberta and SF Canada, too. I met Candas about fifteen years ago at The Banff Centre for the Arts. Her mentorship has been life-altering for me. She is outspoken and generous. Her finely-honed bullshit detector and wicked sense of humour are invaluable. She plays a mean Scrabble. She loves Pomeranians. If you bump into her at dim sum, buy her some egg tarts.

**Monica Meneghetti:** What was your coming out process like? What are your thoughts on the process generally?

**Candas Jane Dorsey:** I came of age in the late sixties and early seventies, when there was much more fluidity than there was earlier -- or later. It was almost the duty of any young free spirit (a.k.a. hippie) to experiment with sexuality and drugs. I didn't like drugs, so...! So the sexual understanding came early and without a great deal of angst. Of course I've had the ongoing question of what data to reveal to whom, but there was never really a problem with who I was. I just was—and am—who I am. Perhaps I got good advice from Popeye the Sailor Man: "I yam who I yam and that's all that I am..."! Whatever the reason, I felt and feel quite centred in my identity as a bisexual.

The polyamory thing (I never called it that, just "non-exclusive") was more of a problem, not in coming out but in the pressures I got from various partners. For their sake, I tried to be exclusive, but it wasn't logical to me. However, I don't have any issues like that with my bi partner of almost 18 years, who is non-exclusive also, although we define our relationship as primary and central. We shared a boyfriend for a while, but he was unwilling to commit fully, so we broke up with him, probably just before he broke up with us.

For some people, being queer is the first time they've been beyond the white picket fence that defines hetero-normative monogamy. So they have to make it a central organising principle in their lives. They "come out" with a flourish and much fallout in the intolerance of family or community or

church or all three, or they hide miserably in the closet with much suicidal angst and then come out to save their lives. They "learn to be gay" as one young man told me he was doing, transforming himself from a Newfie roughneck from the oil patch into a swish young tipped-hair queen. They define themselves by their attire and another, equally rigid set of subcultural norms: lesbians dress thus, gay men decorate their houses so, bisexuals haven't made up their minds yet, etc. These subcultural norms replace the majority culture and are as rigidly enforced and adhered to.

Now, I am not belittling the emotional struggle, because I know a lot of the reason why this didn't happen to me is just luck. But a lot of isolating, interesting, difficult things happened to me—and before I was a sexually active being at that—so I was used to being a solitary and making my own decisions, not going with the cultural norms. Those norms hadn't helped me as a child or as a teen, so they weren't likely to attract me as an adult, especially given the attractive alternative of hippie ideology, with its emphasis on freedom, exploration and discovery, self-realisation and self-definition.

**MM:** Your novel, *Black Wine*, won the James Tiptree, Jr. Award—the literary prize for science fiction or fantasy that expands or explores our understanding of gender. And many of your short stories leave characters' genders unspecified. What are some of your thoughts on gender?

**CJD:** Writing about gender has, by and large, been an accident of my world-view getting into my writing. Gender appears to be a primary datum for most people, queer as well as straight. But it isn't for me, and that was reflected in the relative lack of importance I gave to providing that datum about my characters to my readers. This led to characters with no gender pronouns, and that led to people reading gender and sex issues into stories about other things. Eventually, that led to some people thinking of me as a radical writer, and in that sense I guess I am. But from my point of view, this is just part of what I write. I'm glad it has swiveled so many people's minds 180 degrees away from preconceptions, even if only for long enough to know how it feels not to have them! Writers like to have made a difference with their writing.

**MM:** Your novel, *A Paradigm of Earth*, was shortlisted for the Spectrum Award and for Canada's Sunburst Award. In it, an infant alien learns what it is to be human through being raised by a human who happens to be a bisexual, polyamorous woman. So it's a queering and pacifying of the archetypal "first contact" story. Did you deliberately create a bi/poly protagonist?

**CJD:** Bi/poly protagonists are the default character for me. I have to think in a very different way to create other

*Dorsey, continues on next page*



*Dorsey, continued from previous page*

characters—heterosexual, monogamous for instance! So the character Morgan arose naturally. The book grew out of my dream about her and the alien.

**MM:** As the head of a Canadian small press, you fought a censorship battle that followed the publication of *Neurotic Erotica* by Timothy J. Anderson. How has that experience affected your writing life?

**CJD:** I wouldn't say it affected my writing life, but it made me a great deal more cynical, and tried my patience, and made publishing just that little bit harder. It made me more aware of the forces ranged against freedom of expression. Also, I learned that people will lie and cheat and twist and misquote in order to support bigoted positions, and insistently reject learning and changing their minds. This is not always true of liberal thinkers, though all humans are prone to the error of self-referential stubbornness.

It shocks me that many people were more willing to disseminate and believe lies than to look at the facts. We still hear astonishing distortions of truth coming back to us about that controversy. Lastly, it also shocked me that people were willing to make actionable personal libels and slanders without a second thought and without any pretensions of civility.

There's that expression "Sadder but wiser." The problem is, so many of these learnings are repeated. So in the end, one gets sadder and sadder rather than wiser. It's discouraging to imagine that after all the great ethical thinkers and freedom fighters, the noisiest results are still achieved by the barbarians. What does that say about us as human beings?

**MM:** Do you view "out" writing as a form of activism?

**CJD:** Yes and no.

Yes, because every piece of writing changes the reader's world view a tiny bit anyway. So if the writing presents an alternative to the mainstream way of thinking of people, culture, the family, this will make the reader think about their own assumptions and preconceptions.

However this can happen just as easily when not intended. For instance, as you mentioned earlier, I left genders unspecified in some of my short stories. This was not done to be political as such, but merely because it seemed an interesting thing to do on the side, as a kind of enrichment of the story milieu. I wrote these stories in the 70s and 80s and actually got a certain amount of flak and lack of understanding at first. Then suddenly, ten or fifteen years later, people were saying how radical this was. I had readers saying that this was the most profound insight about the stories for them: the fact that a person could be a lover of either gender, for instance, and it didn't matter. Or that a person could be conducting their life activities while not primarily identified by gender, and

*Dorsey, continued on page 8*

## Women's Nightlife in the Boston Area

### THURSDAYS

Women's Dance Night at the Midway Café  
3496 Washington St, Jamaica Plain  
617-524-9038  
[www.myspace.com/wonkyproductions](http://www.myspace.com/wonkyproductions)

### FRIDAYS

Dance night at PURE  
10 pm - 2 am  
75 Warrenton St, Boston  
617-417-0186

### SATURDAYS

Second Saturdays at Machine Nightclub  
1254 Boylston St, Boston, 21+, \$10  
[www.dykenight.com](http://www.dykenight.com)

Every Saturday at Randolph Country Club  
New look. New atmosphere. Everybody welcome.  
RCC, 44 Mazzeo Dr., Randolph  
10 pm - 2 am. 21+, \$5  
[www.myspace.com/peachesrcc](http://www.myspace.com/peachesrcc)

### SUNDAYS

Women's night every Sunday. Doors open at 7, The L Word at 9.  
DJ msladyj with an eclectic mix from house to jazz.  
No cover, complimentary appetizers, 21+  
STIX Restaurant & Lounge, 35 Stanhope Street, Boston  
857-233-6032

And then, of course, there are always  
BBWN's fabulous potluck brunches for bi  
women and our friends. Our brunches are  
held in women's homes, and ALL women are  
welcome. See our calendar  
(pp. 15 and 16) for details.





**AK:** Liberating! I loved everything about being out, proud and loud about it! I can't wait for pride this year. It was so comforting to be amidst people just like me, who have in their own way experienced what I have, if not more. It felt reassuring to know that there was someone out there that I could turn to. Bisexuals didn't really have a prominent place in Pride, but I guess first we get our discriminatory law repealed and then we celebrate Pride.

**RO:** Since this experience, have you stayed involved? What has that been like?

**AK:** I've had to move back to my hometown (Pune) because of circumstances that needed me to be closer to my parents. It feels like coming back to closet-town. I will be traveling to Delhi and Bangalore on occasion to meet with friends and be reminded of the community out there. Mumbai is closer and I have yet to take a drive down and meet with the women there. I have otherwise been unable to actually do something drastic, which is something I would love to get involved in.

**RO:** What value, if any, do you see in international activism, in keeping in touch with bi activists in other countries? Do you think the movement in India is/was inspired/influenced

by movements in other countries, or has been an inspiration/influence on others?

**AK:** I think everything affects each other. Of course, if it weren't for the community in San Francisco coming out in a big way, none of us would be where we are today. In this same way, once we get our law repealed, other countries will be brave enough to fight for their equal rights.

#### RESOURCES IN INDIA

Rainbow Pride Connexion: you can join this group through invite only. You have to know a dyke who can get you in. Their screening process ensures that only women get in, which, honestly.. is a relief!!

Good as You Bangalore: [www.geocities.com/goodasyoubangalore](http://www.geocities.com/goodasyoubangalore)

On Facebook: Queer Desis; Pink Delhi; LABIA

Queer Azaadi (Mumbai Based): [queerazaadi.wordpress.com](http://queerazaadi.wordpress.com)

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#### *B.J., continued from page 1*

the customs and opinions of other nations in order to survive. And yet there are times when I miss a joke or an allusion, or when I do something that makes people laugh and remember that I am foreign. As it is with bilingual and bicultural, so it is with bisexual. The "bi"ness is true to an extent, but it always creates an awareness of a divide even as it purports to be smoothing over strict separations. I am not with both men and women at the same time and in the same way, so calling myself "bisexual" can highlight a lack, an absence of pure grayness, just as using the word "bilingual" or "bicultural" might make people think of all the languages and cultures I don't know, all the language skills and cultural knowledge I lack. Bi bridges, even as it shows the swift currents flowing under the bridge.

Maybe one day we will just all call ourselves sexual. We will get rid of modifiers and recognize that they don't matter so much. We will learn other languages and be lingual, we will live in other countries and be cultural, we will enjoy our fellow humans and be sexual.

We will say good-bye to bi. We won't need it. It's been serving us well in that we bis have made the gray space more acceptable. But I can only hope that in the near future, we won't be bi. We'll just be.

*B.J. Epstein is a writer, editor and translator in Wales. She is currently finishing her PhD in translation studies. She can be contacted via her website, [www.awaywithwords.sel](http://www.awaywithwords.sel).*





was possible!) Late one night after a party, I summoned all the courage I possessed, and confessed to my best friend, "I think that I might be lesbian, bisexual, or something like it." Her response: "Okay!" Whew!

The sky did not fall. The earth kept spinning. And I was out of the closet at last.

Well, sort of. I still didn't know what to call myself. So, I called the GLBT National Hotline.<sup>1</sup> The friendly, young gay man who answered informed me that one's attraction to both genders does not have to be equal in order to "count" as bisexual. It is surprisingly common to have a strong preference for one gender, while still having feelings for the other. That revelation was a major turning point. The next thing I knew, I was attending every GLBT social event I could find, and managed to find my way toward the local bisexual support group. I found a wonderfully understanding, supportive group of people who identified as bisexual. I was out and proud as ...something, but what?

I was out of the dark, lonely closet at last, but still I felt lost. Could this wonderful, supportive group of bisexuals possibly relate to my dateless adolescence? In high school, I had not been able to find a single boy in my school of 900 attractive, or at least attractive enough to date. Sure, there were a few candidates, such as Alan<sup>2</sup>, who seemed nice, and Andy, who was sort of cute. But that nowhere near compared to the way I felt about my friend Beth. I thought she was breathtakingly beautiful, even if she didn't feel that way about herself. I thought about her constantly, and longed to be with her all the time. If we were supposed to hang out, and she had to cancel, you would think that the world was about to come to an end. She was far from the only one about whom I felt that way. There was also Jillian, a quiet, bookish, extremely bright girl who knew more physics than most college professors. I looked forward enormously to our daily walks home from school, where together we would solve all the world's problems. (I later found out that she was bisexual, too. If only I had known!) Later, there was Elizabeth. And Kerry. And countless others, including an embarrassing crush on a popular girl who was well out of the league of a science geek like me.

Also, could bisexuals relate to the vast difference between my attractions to women and to men? One telling example of this is how I prepared for my first date with a woman. I, a feminist who refused to wear makeup, stunned my family and friends by going on a shopping spree for the perfect outfit, shoes, and pocketbook to match. A pocketbook! Wasn't that an unnecessary burden created by the fashion industry to keep women down? I certainly didn't need to carry one, let alone get one to match my outfit! Yet somehow I found myself in Ann Taylor Loft, agonizing over which thimble-sized, overpriced pocketbook matched one of the several new outfits I had just bought. On the big day, I spent the entire morning getting ready. I changed clothes many times before finally settling on the perfect outfit. By contrast,

here was my routine to get ready for a date with a guy: pick out a nice T-shirt and jeans, comb my hair. Done. Did this great difference in motivation somehow make me a lesbian?

But even as I didn't feel "bisexual enough," I found to my surprise that I didn't fit into the lesbian identity, either. My feelings for boys may have been extremely rare, but they did occur. For example, in my mid-twenties, I developed a huge crush on Adam, a close male friend of mine. Ironically, I recognized the feelings as such, because it was the same way I had felt about girls! Just as with Beth, I thought about Adam constantly. I wanted to be around him all the time. I fantasized repeatedly about us kissing, among other things. At work, I made many lame excuses to stop by his office. He loved to eat, so I would always bring him snacks. I suppose he could blame me for any weight gain... if there was any on his tall, slender frame. We decided that we were better off as friends (long story), and continue to be close to this day. However, there was no way that I could fit into the lesbian category after that experience. Using that label would discount the reality of my prior feelings for Adam, in addition to a handful of other men in my past.

Finally, in the interest of coming out as "something" in this label-happy world, I settled on the term "bisexual". Personally, it is because it acknowledges my attraction to men as well as women. Politically, it is because I feel that bisexual visibility is extremely important.

However, I continue to long for a label that describes more accurately the reality of my feelings. But, what am I "really?" I change my mind almost daily. So far, I have gone through the following: mostly lesbian, lesbian-identified bisexual (too wordy), queer, Kinsey 5, fluid, pansexual, and even "unlabeled." I rejected "queer" because even though I feel there is a serious need for an all-inclusive term, I dislike the word's negative history. I considered "Kinsey 5," but even though the mathematician in me loves numbers, how can you put a number on human feelings? Just imagine if you had to quantify how much you love your mother! I also discarded the term "fluid," because it just doesn't feel right. I don't know why not. Maybe it's because my feelings are not "fluid," but fixed towards women most of the time. I suppose I like "mostly lesbian" the best... except in those rare moments when I fall in love with a guy, and then somehow it doesn't fit.

It seems to me that the labels have not kept up with the reality of sexual orientation. It is as if someone decided that the only shoe sizes that exist are 3 and 12. Anyone whose feet do not fit is a size "medium." However, lumping together people whose feet are as small as size 4 with those who are as big as size 10 is absurd. Similarly, the following people, while one could technically label them as "bisexual," have vastly diverse experiences that need to be acknowledged: "lesbians" who have sex with men, "straight women" who are turned on by

<sup>1</sup> GLBT National Hotline: 1-888-THE-GLNH (1-888-843-4564)

<sup>2</sup> Names have been changed to protect the innocent and otherwise.

Tracy, continues on page 9



We know that the wheel isn't the same shape or texture anymore and we need help in figuring out how to keep the wheel moving, but whether we call ourselves bisexual or queer or omnisexual or any other word, we hope to keep our community strong and vibrant for many years to come.

I was very cheered by the discussion in the workshop and the way that people expressed feeling a connection to each other, despite the different terms. I think it's important to have these dialogues so that we can understand differing perspectives and still appreciate the overriding issues that unite our understanding of the world.

Another tenured activist at the conference told me that he had been envious of the younger generation that is getting a reputation for being much more accepting of GLBT people now. But then he went to a workshop where there were a lot of young bisexuals describing experiences of the same types of discrimination and biphobia that he had been fighting for the last 25 years. He wasn't envious any more, just sad that these same issues will continue to bind us no matter what we call ourselves.

## HELLO my name is

I am fluid. I am flowing. I am strong and deep and rolling and curvy. I am sexual. I am both yet neither. I am dichotomous, androgynous, ambiguous, and balanced. I am outgoing and shy, sensible and silly, brazen and scared. I am his and hers. I am a Christian. I am an ally. I am me.

I am a student and a friend and a daughter and a realist. I am scarred from accidents and biopsies. I am addicted to reality TV, new purses, and Indian food. I am late to the game. I am logical. I am resilient, sensitive, and complex. I am me.

At any given chance, I am checking out your butt. I am your pin-up model and your Prince Charming. I am willing to try what makes you happy. I am your permission slip, your rational thought, your cheerleader. I am me.

According to my butch lesbian friends, I am femme because I like makeup, skirts, and high heels. According to my straight gay friends, I am one of the boys because I like fast cars, beer, and boxing. If you listen to my gay gay friends, I am a drag queen waiting to happen. My straight chick friends say I am loud and funny. All of them are right.

I am unconcerned with whatever you want to call me. Because I am okay with me.

Cari is a 32-year-old Master's Student at the University of Kentucky, who was finally honest with herself 3 months ago.

## unforgettable

by N. K.

i'm that girl, you know?

the kind they sing songs about  
write poetry to  
fall in love with  
and spend their whole lives looking for.

i'm that girl, you know?

the kind that dances until morning  
hair loose and shirt tight  
with a closet full of little black dresses  
and broken hearts to match.

i'm that girl, you know?

the kind the boys can't get enough of  
(and the girls too)  
and they say, you know, they can't tell  
which they prefer--my bark or my bite

i'm that girl, you know?

i mean, i was that girl... until the day you stepped  
on my stars  
and into my life.

NK was born and raised in California. She is a 20-year-old Muslim woman of Korean descent, and a recent NYU graduate.

## B-Girls Reading List

At the most recent BBWN brunch, everyone was asked to recommend a book to the group. Below is an amazing genre-hopping list of some very interesting fiction and nonfiction books. Happy summer reading!

- \*\*\* *Life is Friends: A Complete Guide to the Lost Art of Connecting in Person*, by Jeanne Martinet
- \*\*\* *Unaccustomed Earth: Stories*, by Jhumpa Lahiri
- \*\*\* *Chains*, by Laurie Halse Anderson
- \*\*\* *Elements of Murder: A History of Poison*, by John Emsley
- \*\*\* *How to Grow More Vegetables and Fruits (and Nuts, Berries, Grains, and Other Crops) Than You Ever Thought Possible on Less Land Than You Can Imagine*, by John Jeavons
- \*\*\* *The Eyre Affair: A Thursday Next Series*, by Jasper Fforde
- \*\*\* *The Company*, by Robert Littell
- \*\*\* *Case Histories: A Novel*, by Kate Atkinson
- \*\*\* *Fun Home: a family tragicomedy*, by Alison Bechdel
- \*\*\* *The Time Traveler's Wife*, by Audrey Niffenegger
- \*\*\* *Words Under the Words: Selected Poems*, by Naomi Shihab Nye
- \*\*\* *No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*, by Alexander McCall Smith
- \*\*\* *Are You My Mother?*, by P.D. Eastman
- \*\*\* *Life & Fate*, by Vasily Grossman

And of course... the second edition of *Getting Bi: Voices from Around the World*, edited by Robyn Ochs and Sarah Rowley, which is due out in June and can be ordered at [biresource.net](http://biresource.net).



## Calendar, continued from page 16

### June 26 to June 29. BiCamp 2009

Join your fellow bisexuals and friends in a beautiful country setting near Northampton, MA (Lesbianville USA). Campers must provide their own tent, food, and transportation (sharing is encouraged). BiCamp includes showers and flush toilets. And we have the space all to ourselves! Basically, what you get is a place to pitch your tent, a fire pit, fresh water, beautiful wilderness, and the company of a few dozen bisexual and bi-friendly people for a fun summer weekend. Clothing-optional swimming is just a short walk through the woods. BiCamp is open to all bisexuals and friends at least 18 years of age (or accompanied by a parent or guardian). For more information contact [bicamp.reg@gmail.com](mailto:bicamp.reg@gmail.com) or visit [biversity.org/bicamp.html](http://biversity.org/bicamp.html).

## JULY

**Wednesday, July 1, 6:30-9 pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS).** (See June 3<sup>rd</sup>)

**Tuesday, July 7, 7-9 pm, BRC Board Meeting.** (See June 9<sup>th</sup>)

**Monday, July 13, 7 pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** (See June 8<sup>th</sup>)

**Thursday, July 16, 7 pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS).** (See June 3<sup>rd</sup>)

**Saturday, July 18, 11:30 am, Saturday Bi Brunch.** (See June 20<sup>th</sup>)

**Sunday, July 19, 1:00 pm, BBWN Book Swap and Potluck BBQ in Brockton at Ellyn's.** Yes, it's a mouthful, but the swap is really worth the trip down to the lovely South Shore. We'll fire up the grill and supply all the condiments. We will have veggie burgers, some side salads, and some drinks. Just as we do at the brunches, the idea is to bring a dish and drinks to share with the group. Please bring any meat that you wish to grill, none will be supplied. Bring a few books to swap with others (not required to attend the BBQ) and take home

a few for your summer reading. Contact Ellyn at [nellythrustmor@comcast.net](mailto:nellythrustmor@comcast.net) for directions and to let her know you'll be attending.

## AUGUST

**Wednesday, August 5, 7 pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS).** (See June 3<sup>rd</sup>)

**Monday, August 10, 7 pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** (See June 8<sup>th</sup>)

**Tuesday, August 11, 7-9 pm, BRC Board Meeting.** (See June 9<sup>th</sup>)

**August 14-18, Bi Health Summit, Chicago.** As part of the LGBTI Health Summit. For more info visit [www.2009lgbthealth.org](http://www.2009lgbthealth.org).

**Saturday, August 15, 11:30 am, Saturday Bi Brunch.** (See June 20<sup>th</sup>)

**August 16-22, Carnival Week in Provincetown.** A week of festive activities including Drag Bingo, the absolutely fabulous Carnival Parade on Thursday and much more. Bring your beads, bathing suit and sunscreen! More info at [www.ptown.org/Carnival.asp](http://www.ptown.org/Carnival.asp).

**Thursday, August 20, 7 pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS).** (See June 3<sup>rd</sup>)

## Bi Women wants you!!!



### SUBSCRIPTION RATE for Bi Women (sliding scale)

- ☐ \$0-20 pay what you can  
☐ \$20-39 (suggested)  
☐ \$30-\$99: Supporter  
☐ \$100 on up: Goddess

☐ Renewal  
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NAME

ADDRESS

EMAIL

Please send my **Bi Women** ☐ by email; ☐ by postal mail; ☐ both ways

BBWN, P.O. BOX 301727, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130



## The "Bi Office"

is the Bisexual Resource Center, located at 29 Stanhope Street, behind Club Cafe. For info call 617-424-9595.

### Ongoing Events

#### Last Fridays:

**Bi Women's Rap**, 7:30-9:00 p.m. at the Cambridge Women's Center, 46 Pleasant St., Cambridge. For info and discussion topics call 617-354-8807.

#### 2nd Mondays:

**Straight Marriage, Still Questioning**. Email kate.e.flynn@gmail.com for more info.

#### 1st Wednesdays, 3rd Thursdays:

**BLISS: Biseuxal Support & Social Group**, 7-8:45 p.m. The group meets at the Bisexual Resource Center at 29 Stanhope St. in Boston. Call 617-424-9595 for info.

#### 3rd Saturdays:

**Biversity Brunch**, 11:30 a.m. at Johnny D's, Davis Square, Somerville.

*Sign up for our new email list! Send an email to: **biwomenboston-subscribe@yahooogroups.com***



# CALENDAR

## JUNE

**Wednesday, June 3, 7-8:45 pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLISS)**. Meets on the 1st Wednesday and 3rd Thursday of each month at the Boston Living Center, 29 Stanhope Street, Boston. All bi and bi-friendly people of all genders and orientations are welcome to attend. First Wednesday meetings are peer facilitated discussion groups, sometimes with a pre-selected topic or presenter. Third Thursday meetings are 7-8 pm check-ins, discussion, and announcements followed by social time at a nearby restaurant. Only want to socialize? Meet the group at or shortly after 8 pm in the lobby of the Living Center.

**Sunday, June 7, AIDS Walk Boston**. The 6.2-mile walk starts at the Hatch Shell at 7:30 am in Boston's Back Bay to raise money and awareness for HIV prevention, advocacy and service. For more info, visit [www.aac.org](http://www.aac.org).

**Sunday, June 7, Unity at Sea Sunset Women's T-Dance and Boat Cruise**. Board at 3:30 pm at Rowes Wharf for a 4-7 pm cruise. \$20 tix. For more info and to order tickets go to [www.dykenight.com/unity.html](http://www.dykenight.com/unity.html).

**Monday, June 8, 7 pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning**. A peer led support group for women in a straight marriage/relationship struggling with sexual orientation or coming out. For more info: contact kate.e.flynn@gmail.com. Meets on the second Monday of each month.

**Tuesday, June 9, 7:00-9:00 pm, Bisexual Resource Center Board Meeting**. All bi and bi-friendly community members welcome to attend. Email Ellyn at [brc@biresource.net](mailto:brc@biresource.net) for more info. At the Boston Living Center, 29 Stanhope St. near Back Bay station on the Orange Line.

**Friday, June 12, 6:00 pm, Boston's Dyke March**. Gather at the Boston Common

Gazebo at 6:00 for a night of frolicking and marching with the queerest women in town.

#### Saturday, June 13, Pride Day in Boston.

This year's theme: Trans-forming Our Community. Kicking off from the South End on Tremont Street, the parade will wind its way down Tremont, up Beacon Street and down the other side of Beacon Hill into Government Center. There will be a bi contingent marching together, look for the BRC banner. We will post the exact place to meet up by email and on the Facebook page. Join the BRC Yahoo group ([biresourcecenter](http://biresourcecenter.com)) to make sure you get the email. Want to help volunteer at the BRC booth at the Pride Festival? Email [brc@biresource.net](mailto:brc@biresource.net) to get involved.

**Saturday, June 13, Dyke Night's LUSH Pride Party**, at Machine Nightclub, 1254 Boylston St, Boston. Comedy show 9-10 pm, Dance Party 10 pm-2 am. \$20 tickets. For more info and to order tickets go to [www.dykenight.com/lush.html](http://www.dykenight.com/lush.html).

**Sunday, June 14, Heat on the Street: Perkins Street Block Party**, noon-7 pm. Keep on dancing at the hottest women's block party the day after Pride. Details: [www.bostonpride.org/jpbp.php](http://www.bostonpride.org/jpbp.php).

**Thursday, June 18, 7 pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLISS)**. (See June 3<sup>rd</sup>)

**Saturday, June 20, 11:30 am, Bi Brunch**. This mixed-gender bi group now meets monthly on 3rd Saturdays at Johnny D's on Holland St. in Davis Sq. in Somerville, across the street from the Davis stop on the Red Line.

**Friday, June 26, Dyke Night's Fourth Fridays at Milky Way**. NEW Location: 284 Amory St, Jamaica Plain. Doors open at 9:00 pm, DJ 10 pm-1 am.

**Calendar** continues on page 15



# Bi Women

A newsletter produced by the Boston Bisexual Women's Network, for women everywhere

Fall 2009: Sept./Oct./Nov.  
Vol. 27 No. 4 • Visibility

## "Good"

by V. F.

A couple of years ago, I broke up with my girlfriend and prepared to be devastated for at least the next year. I knew I had made the right decision, but I had a hard time believing I could feel such passion for another person in my lifetime. It was a difficult time for me, but all of my friends were there to support me. My straight friends reminded me of the aspects of our relationship that were problematic, and applauded me for making the right decision. My lesbian friends consoled me by reminding me that there were many great women out there in the world. In this respect, I was fortunate: I had all of my friends to rely on during a trying time.

Not long after my breakup, I went out one evening and a charming man asked me to dance. I smiled, in that "I'll humor you" kind of way, expecting to be disappointed and go home missing my ex even more. But my assumptions were wrong. This handsome and fun-loving man swept me off my feet that night, and before he said goodbye, asked if we could see each other again. I gave him my phone number, and chatted away into the night with my girlfriends, trying to figure out whether he would call.

The next day, he did call. I remember the palpable flutter of my heart when I answered the phone. I liked him. We went

"Good" continues on page 8

## Semantic Wars

by Kim Westrick and Amy Andre

*Bisexual friends Kim Westrick and Amy Andre got together to have a conversation about the semantic challenge of "bi" vs. "queer" as identity labels.*

**Amy:** Recently, a friend asked me about my reluctance to identify as queer (as opposed to my standard bisexual identity), in light of the fact that I have trans/genderqueer partners who don't identify as male or female. The reason is because "queer" is a complicated term with a history of violence for many elders (and some non-elders, too) in our community. I understand the impetus to reclaim the word "queer," but I'm not especially interested in being part of that movement toward reclamation. And although "queer" works for me as a self-label in certain contexts, "bi," on the other hand, is always an appropriate self-description.

But my friend's question got me thinking: given the fact that so many bisexual friends and community members reject the idea that gender has to have a relation to attraction and behavior, why *should* I reject the bi label? Why did her question even come up? How relevant is gender to the concept of bisexuality? If

Semantic Wars continues on page 6

## Bi Visibility at the LGBT Human Rights Conference in Copenhagen

by Di Ponti

I really wanted to go to the LGBT Conference on Human Rights that happened in my city, Copenhagen, from 27th -29th July 2009, as part of the World Outgames. Registration was expensive, and gave rise to protests and to alternative DIY human right gatherings, because it should be a human right to go to human rights conferences. I found a solution, and signed up as a volunteer.

While the whole city vibrated with LGBT people, and with competitions and celebrations of alternative sexualities, about 800 people met at the new concert hall and the fancy IT University to discuss LGBT rights, fights, strategies, freedoms. There were 25 keynote speakers, from grassroots activists to politicians, speaking in twice daily plenary sessions—and plenty of workshops, about 20 parallel sessions, also twice a day.

The atmosphere was quite emotional. Svend Robinson (first openly gay Member of Parliament in Canada and a conference co-chair) kept using words like 'sisters and brothers,' and 'us,' making it feel inclusive. I was moved to witness and feel part of such an important movement. In the first session I cried when Virginia Apuzzo (feminist, politician and activist, USA) mentioned that there is no reason for our community to be discriminatory, after all of us have been discriminated against in one way or another. I thought immediately of being bisexual, and not having felt entirely welcome in some lesbian/gay settings. Later, Kemone Brown (a young lesbian activist and feminist from Jamaica) also

Copenhagen continues on page 7



At the Copenhagen conference: Hilde Vossen (see p. 3), Di Ponti, Yemisi Ilesanmi, & Robyn Ochs



## HONOR ROLL

Katelynn Bishop,  
Malkah Feldman,  
Deb Morley,  
Robyn Ochs,  
Ellyn Ruthstrom,  
Lisa Silveria,  
Gail Zacharias,

And many more  
fabulous people!  
You know who  
you are!

**Bi Women is  
published quarterly.**

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com**

## From your editor

The theme of this issue is "Visi**B**ility." Related to this theme, we offer essays by Lindsay and V. F., a short play by Tracy, and an article by Di on bi visibility at the LGBT Human Rights Conference in Copenhagen, July 24-27, 2009. Also on theme is Amanda's report on the Bi Media Summit held in NYC on May 30, 2009.

In addition, Kim and Amy discuss semantics, Neelima asks, "Where's the B in LGBT?", Lara reviews *Love You Two* by Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli, and Lindsay offers us a new poem.

Our "Bis Around the World" feature takes us to The Hague, Netherlands, our Bi of the Month is Elissa Ortiz, and of course, we offer our fabulous calendar of events in the Boston area.

And for those who are curious: in addition to more than 550 subscribers in the United States, we now have subscribers in Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, India, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, St. Thomas (USVI), and the UK. And our mailing list is growing!

**Remember, you fabulous women: this is YOUR newsletter. Please consider supporting us with your dollars (if you have any). Please read the important announcement on page 15, and read the insert (if you're receiving a print copy) or the attachment (if you're receiving the electronic version). And please consider writing something for the next issue!**

Bi for now,  
Robyn



(For info about Robyn's speaking tours, visit her at [robynochs.com](http://robynochs.com) or friend her on Facebook. Or both.)

## Next in Bi Women

The theme for the Winter 2009 issue:

### Bi Health

Here are some specific suggestions for articles: \*Bi Health project at Fenway \*Report on the Bi Health Summit \*Write about the recent study that found that bi and trans folk have more health issues than our L/G counterparts \*Give your personal account of coming out to medical providers as bi, finding a good therapist, etc. \*What else does "Bi Health" mean to you?

Submissions for the next issue are due to [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com) by November 5th.

Send your suggestions for future topics to [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com)

Upcoming themes will include:

The Youth Issue; Trans/Gender; Fantasy; Choice; Out at Work; and more.

## Submit to Bi Women!

Send articles, calendar entries, letters, poems, black-and-white art, news, and views to:

Bi Women:

[biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com)

If you do not want your name published, or wish to use a pseudonym, please tell us.

**Bi Women can be found online  
at [biwomenboston.org](http://biwomenboston.org).**

The Boston Bisexual Women's Network is a feminist, not-for-profit collective organization whose purpose is to bring women together for support and validation. It is meant to be a safe environment in which women of all sexual self-identities, class backgrounds, racial, ethnic and religious groups, ages, abilities and disabilities are welcome. Through the vehicles of discussion, support, education, outreach, political action and social groups related to bisexuality, we are committed to the goals of full acceptance as bisexuals within the gay and lesbian community, and to full acceptance of bisexuality and the liberation of all gay and transgender people within the larger society.



## Bis Around the World: Hilde Vossen, The Hague, Netherlands

by Robyn Ochs

*It is an honor to feature Hilde Vossen, a long-time activist who has had a major impact on both the Dutch and international bi movements.*

*Robyn:* Please tell us about yourself.

*Hilde:* Hallo! Ik heet Hilde Vossen... Hi! My name is Hilde Vossen and I live in The Hague. My twin brother and I were born on International Women's Day, 8th March 1967. Besides my full-time job as a communications officer for the Dutch government, I play field hockey and enjoy my volunteer jobs. Creative writing, photography, hiking and reading books are things I should do more. Instead, I'm busy volunteering as referee for my local field hockey club, as assessor in acknowledgement of prior learning for immigrants and refugees at Vluchtelingenwerk, as coordinator of the Queer Kick-off BiTransdag, as publicity officer for Queer aan Zee-meetings, as a board member of Homosport Nederland, publicity officer for the Dutch Hockey Divas, a nationwide group of gorgeous lesbian and bisexual women, and moderator for the European Bisexual Network.

*Robyn:* Yikes! That's a lot of activism! Hilde, please tell briefly the story of your coming out as bi.

*Hilde:* The first time I understood that lesbian or bisexual identity was about me was when, at 19, I left my parent's house in the village where I grew up and started to live on my

own in the city of Nijmegen. An ad in a newspaper led me to a weekend for lesbian and bisexual women of all ages. A 50+ woman who was just out of the closet as lesbian felt so happy for me that I already "knew." She puzzled me, because I didn't know what she meant. I didn't label myself like she did. There I met the first person in my life who openly identified as bisexual.

A few days later I visited my parents and told them where I had been. Mum said, "I hope you aren't a lesbian, because my colleague is and the students call her bad names and harass her. She's always depressed." And Dad said, "Do you still like men? Because if you do, a relationship could also be with a man." I didn't respond.

Another magazine ad led me to the first meeting of the bi women's group of GoBi in Nijmegen. I knew I belonged and started labeling myself as bisexual at 21. Coming-out as bi is something I still often do.

*Robyn:* When did you first become a bi activist? What caused you to get involved?

*Hilde:* At 21, I invited the members of GoBi's bi women's group to meet at my place for its second meeting. I got involved because I wanted to experiment with taking responsibility. Although I lacked self-confidence at that time, I thought, "Yes, I can do this." I once heard somebody say that being a bisexual activist is simply "showing up at meetings that are bi-inclusive." That made me smile. For me it's more than that. It's a commitment to myself and to an organization. I give a helping hand as often as I can. I take this seriously, and at the same time enjoy the fun that it brings.

*Robyn:* Please tell us about a recent bi-related project that excites you.

*Hilde:* Coordinating the Queer Kick-off BiTransdag was really hard work but *big* fun. This event took place in The Hague on June 13th, 2009. For the first time in the Netherlands a nationwide group of queer, bisexual and transgender people organized a day all together. It was so rewarding! At the first meeting I was the only one who I was certain would attend. I prepared the meeting. My stomach ached. "If you can," I asked the nine people who showed up, "and if you like, please tell us your sexual identity and your gender identity." Recognition, laughter! This happened to be the icebreaker the group needed. Some of the organizers had multiple identities, like "I'm bisexual and transgender." We decided to become allies and to work together. We also had two allies, a heterosexual transgender woman and a lesbian, who volunteered.

The day was organized in just a few months. Because of the worldwide economic crisis, we had little money. We co-operated with the local COC, the Dutch Bisexual Network and the Dutch Transgender Network. The program consisted of an opening speech by the famous Dutch author Karin Spink, a powerful debate with representatives from the European Parliament, COC Netherlands, an organization offering special programs for transgender youth, an umbrella organization for Dutch anti-discrimination offices, a trade union, etc., eight workshops, dinner and a party. Over a hundred people showed up and we were delighted with this unexpected high number of participants. People gave us a lot of positive feedback. "It was an inspiring day, very well organized. Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

*Robyn:* Why do you continue to participate in bi activism? What do you get from doing this? Why do you stay involved?

*Hilde, continues on next page*



Photo: Elza de Bruin





Hilde with fairies at Queer Kick-off BiTransday

*Hilde:* Coordinating the Queer Kick-off BiTransday was a welcome test for me. Am I still an activist? Is this something I can enjoy again? In 2007 I stepped back from activism and now I had that mysterious longing for a big project that combined two topics I personally love to bring into the light: sexual identity *and* gender identity. I wanted to continue participating in bi activism, because my answer to the question, "Will you do better than before?" was a hundred percent positive. I was fully aware of pitfalls I'd experienced in the past, like too much hard work, too little joy, or taking on too much responsibility when others don't. Because the role of sole coordinator was unexpected—my transgender counterpart had a medical emergency shortly after the first meeting—I learned a lot about leadership.

The day is over now, but I'll stay involved. This new, creative combination of queers, bisexuals and transgenders working together makes activism perfect for me again. Roze Zaterdag (Pink Saturday, or Pride Day) moves to a different city in the Netherlands each year, and the Pride organization in Amersfoort, the city organizing the 2010 event, invited us to come over and organize something similar for queers, bisexuals and transgenders. They want to be certain to have these target groups covered. I'll also nominate this project for the Diversity Prize 2009. Of course, I want us to win. I keep my fingers crossed!

*Robyn:* You started and oversee an email list called EuroBiNet. Can you tell us a bit about it?

*Hilde:* Yes... the European Bisexual Network, EuroBiNet! Laurence Brewer from the UK, Hanna Bertilsdotter from Sweden and I founded this email list in 2001. It was a result from my workshop, "How to create a strong and sexy European Bisexual Network" at the 1st European Bisexual Conference in Rotterdam, June 2001. The list—like any list—has had its ups and downs, but it still exists and provides, for example, people who contributed to the book *Getting Bi* and stops for your European book celebration tour, Robyn. The current moderators, Lars Naesbye Christensen from Denmark, Laurence and I, are now preparing for the international conference to be organized in the UK in 2010. We'd like the list to be up-to-date, so we can be of help for the organizers of this conference. I'd also like to welcome bi activists from Poland, because in 2010 there'll be EuroPride in Warsaw. Recently the young, feminist bi activist Shiri Eisner from Israel joined us. Her activist story is wonderful! That keeps the spirit going.

*Robyn:* You've personally done a huge amount of international networking. Why is this important to you? What do you get from it?

*Hilde:* International networking is important to me. I learn a lot from it for myself. I meet bi activists from other countries at conferences or when I visit their countries. I listen to their stories and look at their qualities. Who are they and what do they prefer as an activist? For example, in 2006 I met a girl in Norway. She assured me that she wasn't a bi activist. "I just live my little life," she said. That made me question myself. Why am I moderator of EuroBiNet, for example? Who on earth is waiting for such a thing?! Well, it's something I like. I really enjoy keeping the flock together. That's me. I'm the networking type. I'll never forget the moment of gathering during the evening before the 1<sup>st</sup> European Bisexual Conference. People from all over Europe were arriving. Within minutes they were talking and laughing with each other. Safe space. Happy people. Love it!

*Robyn:* What value, if any, do you see in international activism, in keeping in touch with bi activists in other countries? Do you think the movement in the Netherlands was inspired/influenced by movements in other countries, or has been an inspiration/influence on others?

*Hilde:* The value I see in international activism is the information exchange between people. Tell others what you know about media, grants, resources, researches and events. Share your best practices and activists. Empowered, self-confident bisexuals make stronger communities.

I don't know if or how the Dutch or European bisexual movements influence foreigners. I think so, but how precisely? I prefer to share what influences me. I know for sure that international bi-conferences and gatherings do! There I learned how lesbian, gay and transgender people can put the B in the LGBT, how your identity can feed your activism, how it works for somebody to be bisexual and disabled, how you can have fun when you're interviewed in the media, the history of pride days from a bisexual perspective, and how cooperation between bisexuals and transgenders can be successful. Thanks to Cheryl Dobinson whose workshop influenced me at the international conference in Toronto in 2006, I didn't have to reinvent the wheel. It was one of the best sessions during the Queer Kick-off BiTransday!

In 2007, when I walked side by side with Lars Naesbye in the Copenhagen Pride Parade, a Spanish guy and a Portuguese girl joined us, because they recognized the international bi flags that we carried with us. It was great to see their joy when they took the flags for a while. My bi flag was ordered from the US. It was a gift from bi-activist Sólver Sólversson from Iceland while I visited that beautiful country. Talk about international influence!

*Robyn:* Yours is one of the very first countries to have an organized bisexual community. Why do you think that is?

*Hilde:* The bisexual community in the Netherlands started off with many highly educated people in a left-wing political environment. They knew quite well how to influence the media. When I read about the first bi-groups and saw interviews with the first Dutch bi activists, I realized it was quite extraordinary to identify as bisexual at that time. The behavior was common, but not the identity. The local and nationwide magazines from the LGBT organization COC, the feminist magazine *Opzij*, and some big newspapers wrote about it.

*Hilde, continues on next page*



*Hilde, continued from previous page*

We had the openly bisexual famous writer—now First Chamber member of the Dutch government—Anja Meulenbelt, who took invitations from bi groups for panel discussions seriously. We had a bi foundation that organized the first scientific research about bisexuality and made a documentary about bisexuals in the Netherlands. We had the people, politics, media and money. Need more?

*Robyn:* What similarities and differences to you see between the bi movement in the Netherlands and that in the US?

*Hilde:* The Netherlands is geographically small. You can travel almost anywhere in the country in a couple of hours. That makes it much more possible to coordinate a national movement. Activists know each other. Another difference is the level of development. The US has more money for bi research: Fritz Klein was one of the founders of the first fund dedicated to bisexual projects. The last difference is the level of humor. You have the extremely funny *Bisexual's Guide to the Universe*. Tears of laughter run over my face while I read that book. Over here, we finally have two female, openly bisexual stand up comedians: Sara Kroos and Claudia de Breij. That's great, for a start. Now our chances for laughter increase.

oooooooooooooooooooooooooooo

*Editor's note:* Lars, Sölver, and Shiri can all be found in the second edition of *Getting Bi*, and Hilde can be found in the first edition.

#### INTERNET RESOURCES IN THE NETHERLANDS:

Queer Kick-off BiTransdag: <http://bitrans.hyves.nl/>; Landelijk Netwerk Biseksualiteit: <http://www.lnbi.nl/>; European Bisexual Network: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/EURO-BINET/>. And you can find Hilde on Facebook.

## HELP WANTED

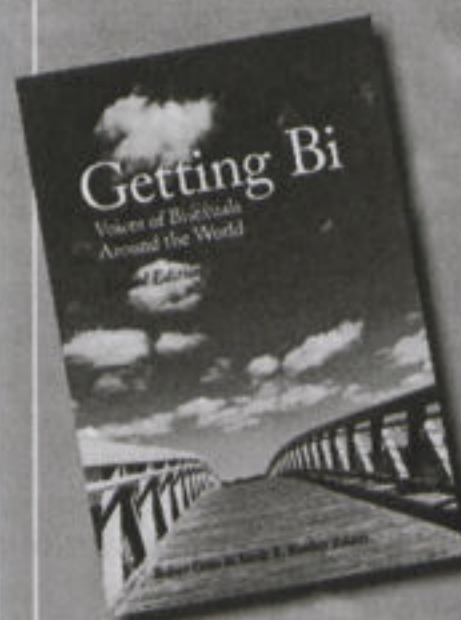
### Brunch Coordinator Invites You to Host

BBWN potluck brunches are a great way to meet other bi women in the Boston area. We try to hold a brunch in a member's home each month so that people can relax and share food and experiences in a safe space. Deb Morley is the brunch coordinator, so please contact her at [debmo345@gmail.com](mailto:debmo345@gmail.com) if you are interested in hosting a brunch. And check out the calendar on pages 15-16 for upcoming activities. We hope you can join us.

### Want to Get Involved With *Bi Women*?

I'm looking for someone to help produce *Bi Women*. Possible roles include: Arts & Culture editor, Guest Editor for an issue on a specific theme, or Assistant Editor (if you want to learn the ropes). Thanks to the miracles of modern technology, you do not have to live in Boston. Contact Robyn: [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com).

## New! Just Published!



### Getting Bi

Voices of Bisexuals  
Around the World  
Second Edition

This international anthology of personal narratives, written by teenagers, grandmothers, and everyone in between, presents a compelling look at contemporary bisexual experience.

#### In the Second Edition, you'll find:

- 42 countries represented, including 10 additional from Iceland to Pakistan
- 220 first-person narratives, including 36 new entries
- Updated features and articles
- New design, more photos

Buy your copy now at [www.biresource.net](http://www.biresource.net).

### Do You Know Web Design?

We're looking for someone to maintain [biwomenboston.org](http://biwomenboston.org), our new website, which uses WordPress. If you are interested, please contact Robyn: [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com). It's the perfect volunteer job, as you can do it from home, in your pajamas, or even in your birthday suit.

### STUDENTS: Looking for an internship?

Are you looking for an internship during the school year or next summer? BBWN and the Bisexual Resource Center may have something for you! Contact [president@biresource.net](mailto:president@biresource.net) and [editor@biwomenboston.org](mailto:editor@biwomenboston.org).



**Semantic Wars, continued from page 1**

bisexuals like me don't care about gender in the way that monosexuals do, why would my identity label exclude my lovers' gender variations? How queer (unusual) am I?

**Kim:** It seems like this is a big issue in the community, so I'm glad you brought it up. Like you, I'm a bi person who sees gender as fluid rather than fixed or dichotomous. In addition to bi, I identify as queer because of its theoretical rejection of body hierarchies, its inclusion of multiple genders and sexual expressions and how it connects me to a larger, political community.

I've also felt outside pressure to reject my bi identity based on the idea that it perpetuates the gender binary: woman/man. However, this idea reduces *bisexual* to "bi" and "sexual" and disregards the fact that it represents a history, a community, a substantial body of writing, and the right of the bi community to define "bisexuality" on its own terms. Most importantly, this idea disregards how vital these things are for countless bi people. Identifying as bi doesn't *inherently* mean anything, and it definitely doesn't *inherently* mean a person only recognizes two genders. However, to assume that bi-identified people exclude transgender, gender nonconforming (GNC), and genderqueer people also assumes they are not trans, GNC, or genderqueer themselves, when in fact, many are.

Of course, there are plenty of cisgender [those whose gender identity matches the behavior or role considered appropriate for their sex] bi people who are transphobic or assume there is little variation in gender expression, just as many gay, lesbian, queer, and straight people do. This is a prevalent and problematic attitude we should all be working against, but not by abandoning the word bisexual and all the good things it represents. What do you think?

**Amy:** I think I love your point about bisexuals not necessarily believing there are only two genders!

Assuming that the "bi" in bisexual means a person thinks there are only two makes as much sense as assuming that monosexual (gay and straight) people think there is only one gender. The prefix doesn't relate information about how many genders a person thinks exists. At the most, it gives an indication of how many genders a person might be attracted to. But, in the case of bi, I don't think it even does that. Because, like you, I identify as bi in part to connect to a particular community, and in part because gender is not an overriding factor in my capacity to desire others.

So, let's take this to a meta-level. What impact do you think these semantic wars have on the development of the bi community?

**Kim:** I think it's really good for the community to reject the idea that there are only two genders, and to be proactive about calling out transphobia. A wide open and inclusive perspective of gender should be a permanent part of our work. In fact, I find that by identifying as bi, I have many opportunities to challenge people on their assumptions. The scene:

**Q: Are you straight or gay?**

A: I'm bi.

**Q: Who do you like better, men or women?**

Sample Answers: "I like all genders the same." "I prefer feminine people, but I don't care what gender they are." "I prefer butch women, but I also date other genders." "I like androgynous people of any gender." "As long as they'll top me, I don't care."

In one sentence you can break down their assumptions and maybe spark a conversation about gender expression and identity.

These semantic wars divide us and distract us from organizing around other important issues. As a white woman, I see that racism and white supremacy are pervasive in queer/LGBT/bi communities and issue prioritization. Yet this glaring problem seems to go mostly ignored.

To begin reaching an inclusive movement, white bisexual and queer people should be spending time and energy recognizing white privilege, and calling out racism and white supremacy. Bi people of color (BiPOC) are vastly underrepresented in bi events, and racist and classist comments go unchecked. Semantic wars sidetrack us from this.

**Amy:** I think you're right about the sidetracking. To me, the focus on what we should or shouldn't call ourselves is a product and reflection of internalized biphobia. The right to name oneself – and have that name be respected by others – is so fundamental to the very start of the movement-building that needs to happen. When we get derailed from building this foundation, we lose sight of the bigger picture. And isn't that just what an oppressive system, a system of classism and racism and sexism, would want us to be doing? In-fighting?

I'm continually fascinated by the interplay of the concepts of love and war. The war around semantics boils down, in part, to us bisexuals and queers finding common (or uncommon) language to describe our capacity to love other human beings. As long as we can love, isn't that enough? And as long as we are loving, haven't we already begun to engage in dismantling the system?

As a person of color, one of the things I value about the bisexual community is the fact that, at least historically, it has been led by women and people of color, and often by women of color. Our bi-icons, such as Lani Ka'ahumanu and Loraine Hutchins, have been leading the community for decades now, and are still two of our strongest voices. I feel privileged to be part of a colorful matriarchy. I share your concern about the current underrepresentation of bi people of color at bi events, and/

**Semantic Wars, continued on next page**



*Copenhagen, continued from page 1*

brought me to tears when she explained her own path to becoming open to her bisexual sisters.

I was going around this warm environment when I noticed Robyn Ochs with Miguel Obradors and Lars Næsbye Christensen (Copenhagen bi-activists), and I felt even warmer. I felt even happier and more touched. Now I wasn't alone, I felt that now I was fully part of the conference. Both the city and the conference were challenging the 'norm': there were plenty of same-sex couples, and people assumed from the outset that one was gay. Felt like fresher air when this minority was so visible, a contrast with the heavy clouds of typical heteronormativity. But when I saw my bi friends, I realized that I still needed to be seen as bi, to be fully respected (because it is who I am). Our struggle is still huge: what about our visibility? Who was to assume that I was bi? I was glad for the bi pins Robyn had brought to sell, and wore them proudly for the remainder of the conference.

The "B" was, of the 4 letters in LGBT, the least represented officially, and also very soft-spoken vocally. At the end of the first day, a number of angry Trans activists kept asking "where is the T?" and questioning why only two of 25 plenary speakers were trans-identified. The T though was still more represented than the B. The B had three workshops, no keynote speaker, and only our Robyn as moderator of one of the sessions. But, overall, our presence and the discussions raised an awareness

in some of the old-school gay activists: I would guess some of them learned something and that in the future we will be more and more included.

The first bi workshop was centered around the book *Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World*. Unfortunately, because the books were not released by Danish customs, we were unable able to purchase copies during the conference, or even the day after, when the LBL-BI (Danish LGBT organization) group organized an afternoon with free workshops, on bi creativity, bi self-help and bi history. At the Getting Bi workshop, people read essays from the book, followed by a spirited discussion. At the second bi workshop organized by Australian bi activist Holly Hammond, two caucuses were called, one for bis and one for allies. And the third was a presentation on bisexuality in Danish film. In all of them, there was a mix of bisexuals and other curious people, not self-identified as bi/variant, with their typical questions: "They can leave you for someone of the other gender! Yes – and also for someone of the same gender!" "They must want both genders at the same time!" Bi and poly are different dimensions, but no wonder some bis feel more welcome in a more inclusive poly-movement. It was endearing to see a gay man presenting on bisexuality in Danish film admit that many instances of homosexuality in modern film are indeed bisexual, and that the forerunners in old film are forerunners to different sexual

identities and preferences of the present days.

Then, in the plenary session moderated by Robyn, Yemisi Ilesanmi, an amazing, clear-headed and outspoken bi-activist from Nigeria, asked, referencing the previous day's protests about the underrepresentation of transgender speakers: "Where is the B in the LGBT?" Robyn acknowledged that bisexuals were underrepresented at the conference, while crediting organizers for the fact that this year's conference had substantially better bi representation than the last one. She charged organizers of the *next* conference to continue this trend.

And bis are essential to keep LGBT and allies from splitting, working as a glue. Instead of grounding a movement in fighting – *us, them, the good and the bad* – we contribute to change by practicing inclusion. I do wish and hope that an inclusive, kind and caring way of tackling bisexuality in and out of the movement will prevail, and that it will become easier and easier to be bi. Or for that matter, that it will be easier to be whatever one is or wants to be.

I've really enjoyed these days, my rainbow-colored city, deep and thoughtful discussions and a sense of pride in diversity. These days re-awoke in me a sense of community, of change, of sharing. I look forward to more.

*Di Ponti is a Portuguese woman living in Copenhagen.*

*Semantic Wars, continued from page 6*

but I'm hopeful for the future, because of the past.

*Kim is a recent graduate of the University of California, Davis where she helped start the school's first bi student group, The Bi Visibility Project. Together with the LGBT Resource Center, Bi Vis put on the campus' first bi education and community week, Beyond the*

*Binary. She is currently working at Centro de Atención Psicológica, a domestic violence prevention center in Monterrey, Mexico.*

*Amy is the co-author of Bisexual Health (2007: National Gay & Lesbian Task Force), and the author of over 30 articles and essays on bisexuality, race politics, and social justice issues. With a master's degree in sexuality studies and an MBA*

*in nonprofit strategy, Amy works in the LGBT nonprofit sector and does public speaking on bisexuality. She has presented to thousands of people at over 100 organizations, conferences, and schools, including Stanford University Medical School, the Gay & Lesbian Medical Association, UCLA, and Brown University. In other words, she's a professional bisexual (or "pro bi")! Visit her online at [www.amyandre.com](http://www.amyandre.com).*



on our first date, and the energy between us was electric. He was smart and funny, thoughtful and kind. I felt on top of the world when I was with him. I soon learned that he was about to move out of town, and I reluctantly accepted the time-limited nature of our romantic relationship. I thought I would make the most of my time with such a wonderful person, and I did. We spent several wonderful summer months together and then, despite my efforts to be "sensible," I was quite heart-broken when he left. I couldn't believe I could feel love for someone so soon after losing my girlfriend. But it was true: I was again feeling that pain of losing someone with whom you feel connected in an indescribable way.

But this breakup turned out to be different. I hadn't had the courage to tell my lesbian friends that I was dating a man, for fear that I would no longer be seen as "one of the girls." So, consequently, they didn't know the joy that was suddenly ripped from my life when he left. My straight friends, because they had been out with me the night I met this man, knew what he had become to me and consoled me through my loss.

While I took comfort in most of my friends' encouragement and support, I became increasingly upset about the fact that I had hidden this aspect of my life from my lesbian and gay friends. One evening stands out in my mind, when I felt the shame and frustration of being a closeted bisexual person. I had just had a difficult day, feeling sorry for myself that I was pining away for a man that was not coming back, when a lesbian friend asked me to dinner. I said yes, thinking it would be nice to spend the evening with a good friend.

But as we sat down to the table she asked, with the sincerest interest, "So how ARE you, my dear?" And without hesitation I said, "Good!" And with that one word I realized instantaneously that I was denying my authentic identity and integrity as a person. I became disheartened during that meal, and many others, because I was afraid to tell my gay friends that I was upset and broken-hearted over a man. I felt torn. I wanted to tell them the truth, but I thought I would lose the inclusion and support of the gay world that was so important to me.

My inability to tell the truth about my life and my loves has been a reflection of my own process of self-acceptance, but it is also a mirror of the gay community and the message it often sends to bisexual and transgender persons. I have heard enough disparaging comments about people who are "not really gay" to know that if I want to be part of the club, it is better that people think I am a lesbian.

But I am not a lesbian. I find myself attracted at times to both men and women, and can have fulfilling relationships with people of any gender. This issue of *Bi Women* is about me and so many other women who have hidden their authentic selves for fear of being left out and misunderstood. Even more importantly, it is about the choice to make ourselves visible so that others like us may feel the power of understanding and community. Harvey Milk said that the greatest political action a queer person can take is to come out of the closet. I believe this to be true and I am proud to say that with the publication of this short essay, I have decided to personally come out to my lesbian and gay friends. Who knows, maybe I can still be part of the club, with a few changes to the bi-laws.

*V.F. is a social worker in Chicago, Illinois.*

## Visibility

by Lindsay Pratt

Monday, two weeks ago, my lunch date with a beautiful young woman ended with her wanting to leave early for time to "process" before a meeting and my feeling like I must be denser than prison cell walls for not picking up whatever signals I apparently missed. After stewing over my failings for a couple of days, spending an inordinate amount of time making emo hipster leather cuffs while blasting riot grrl music and pretending to be tough, she called and asked if I was free that Saturday for a party. A family party. Not wanting to ruin my chances for a second time, I said I would be "delighted to attend" and even offered to help with the set up. And for the next few days I had fantasies of being her strong butch and doing all the heavy lifting for her, completely ignoring the fact that she is several inches taller than I and the only heavy lifting I have done recently has involved the O.E.D. But, come Saturday, I was excited for what the day had in store.

The party was located at her parents' house two hours outside of San Francisco, and as I drove, the scenery around me shifted from cityscape to suburbs to vast rolling hills and sprawling ranch houses complete with pools and stables. I drove up the dirt driveway and found her hanging colorful Chinese lanterns around the patio with her younger sister. Her parents greeted me kindly, and I was put to work assisting with the party prep. All signs pointed to an enjoyable evening. But as guests began to arrive — mostly family members, and more cousins than I had ever seen in one gathering — it began to dawn on me, like Dorothy when suddenly blinded by technicolor, that I was not in San Francisco anymore, and a girl presenting as male was not something that was seen as normal or acceptable in this town.

The male members of the family eyed me suspiciously while their girlfriends and wives made comments in not-so-hushed voices while gathered around the food-laden kitchen island. They used male pronouns and elongated the "eeee" to emphasize my ambiguous gender, and the twin Stepford wives entertained themselves by flirting with me and making lewd gestures, giggling like they were 14 again. I felt exposed. They had, without their knowledge, sensed something about my gender identity that I was not planning to share, and their laughter left me, for the first time, feeling the beginnings of shame.

And while all eyes were on me, and I felt like J. Alfred Prufrock "sprawling on a pin," I realized that I was completely invisible. Yes, they were watching me, sizing me up, but they were not seeing me. They saw my identity, or rather what they perceived that identity to be. I was a "dyke," or "transboy," or whatever it was that each one saw. My name, my interests, my personality were all meaningless: I was merely the queer that had crashed the party.

I spend much of my time focused on what parts of my identity I will share and what I will keep closeted. I dress so that my identity will be more visible and out myself on a constant basis. I do this with pride, and, at times, frustration with the need to be so explicit. But I glimpsed, that day, the smallest fraction of the invisibility that comes with being visible that so many of my transgender friends experience on a daily basis. And what did I do? I ran. I hid. I was afraid to cause a scene even while the deepest part of me was yearning to yell about the ridiculousness of discrimination, because the truth is I can laugh at what happens to me, but the hate that I witness lurking in their eyes is systemic, a wound in our society that long ago went septic. And while it may be easier

Visibility, continues on page 10



## NEWS BRIEFS

### More on Micah Kellner: NY's Openly Bisexual Assemblyman

*Micah Kellner was interviewed recently by Mizz M on bisocialnews.com. Here's an excerpt:*

When I first ran for office, a group of my friends, mostly gay men, decided to sit down with me to determine "what Micah was going to be," because he couldn't be bi. They felt no one would ever accept a bisexual, so some said "say you're straight," and others said "say you're gay". Someone suggested that I should state to the Stonewall Democratic club that while I've had sex with men in the past, I just don't identify as a member of the GLBT community, which I took to mean that I was openly on the "down low," which made no sense. We finally decided honesty was the best policy, but sadly, too often I've found as a public official that bisexuals are the last group that are easily held up to ridicule.

*The full interview can be found at <http://bisocialnews.com/my-interview-with-new-yorks-openly-bisexual-assemblyman-micah-kellner/>*

#### Hidden in Plain Sight, continued from page 11

**Maggie:** You do?

**Leslie:** You are attracted to BOTH men and women...

**Maggie (interrupts):** EXACTLY!

**Leslie:** ...but since you can't make up your mind, you need to have both a man and a woman at the same time!

**Maggie (exasperated):** So CLOSE! And yet so far away!

**Leslie:** What? I thought there were plenty of bisexuals who are polyamorous – that is, who want to have more than one partner.

**Maggie:** Well, there are some *heterosexuals* who want more than one partner.

**Sarah:** Yeah – they're called straight men!

**Maggie:** But, of course, not all straight people want to be poly. Bisexuals are no different. Being polyamorous works well for some people. But it's not for me! I'm a "one at a time" girl.

**Sarah:** And your partner could be any gender?

**Maggie:** Exactly!

**Sarah:** I get it... I think.

**Maggie:** Well, it's a lot to think about.

*(Pause)*

**Maggie:** Wow! It's getting late. I'd better get going.

**Sarah:** Me, too! My parents are arriving in a few days, and I haven't found all the dust bunnies.

**Maggie:** We should do this again sometime!

**Leslie:** Okay. Stay in touch.

**All:** Bye!

*All except Maggie exit*

**Maggie (to audience):** You see what I mean? And people say I'M the one who's confused!

*Curtain*

### Dr. Anita Kozan Receives 2009 Lavender Pride Award

Standing for "People Rallying Individuality, Diversity, and Equality," the PRIDE Awards six individuals or organizations working within and for the GLBT community of Minneapolis/St. Paul. One of this year's award recipients is Dr. Anita Kozan.

There is no doubt that Dr. Anita Kozan deserves recognition for her long-time commitment and service to the LGBT and bi communities.

She is the co-host, with Dr. Marge Charmoli, of BiCities, the nation's only bisexual community TV show. Shown on local cable TV, this half hour show is excellent. I have been a guest on this show twice, and I can personally attest to the quality of the interviewers and the show's amazing volunteer staff.

Dr. Kozan states, "We are bringing information that people otherwise might never have access to. I think resources about bisexuality continue to grow, but people who are bisexual are invisible in the way that, if I am with a woman, I am assumed often to be a lesbian, and if I am with a man, I'm assumed to be heterosexual. We are people, and we look like other people, and we're well-adjusted. I'm very, very proud of the work we've done."



Photo: Hubert Bonnet

But her work on BiCities is just one of her projects. She is also a voice and speech specialist for transgender individuals. She explains, "I want to try to help the person develop the ability to communicate in a way that is consistent with their gender, and most people want to be perceived as either male or female, so we work on voice and speech and mannerisms and gestures, but there's a lot of focus on voice and speech for both groups." She has worked in this field for more than 35 years and helped more than 50 people transition.

She is former President of LGASP, the GLBT Caucus of Audiologists and Speech Language Pathologists (affiliated with the American Speech Language Hearing Association).

She currently runs a small private practice, the Kozan Clinic for Voice, Speech and Spirit, LLC, working with people across the transitioning spectrum, in addition to her full-time job as a speech and language pathologist at Arlington Senior High School in St. Paul, where she helps facilitate the Gay Straight Alliance.

"I feel like it's a blessing in my life," she says about her work. "I feel like I'm really doing God's work. It's phenomenally rewarding and thrilling to see people change."

*Source: Information taken from an interview with Dr. Kozan, and an article by Chad Eldred in Lavender Magazine #366.*





Did you know that Robyn and her wife Peg represented BiNet USA and the Bisexual Resource Center at a special, first-ever LGBT reception at the White House on June 29th? Robyn was proudly wearing her "This is what a bisexual looks like" pin, and both Robyn and Peg had the opportunity to shake hands with Barack and Michelle Obama and even chat with the President for a couple of minutes!

#### Visibility, continued from page 8

for me to lick my superficial scratches in silence and hide behind my (usual) ability to pass, it would be a betrayal of my ideals to do so. It would be a validation of people's discomfort with what, for them, is different. So until the time when I can walk into a white, suburban household and have everyone there see me for who I am, not what I am, it is my task to be unashamedly visible as what I am, because who I am is too valuable to let myself give up.

*Lindsay lives in San Francisco and studies Psychology and Queer Studies at City College of San Francisco. Ze has many interests, including acting and poetry.*

## BOOK REVIEW: *Love You Two* by Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli (Random House Australia, 2008)

*Reviewed by Lara Zielinsky*

*Love You Two* is the story of teenage Pina's discovery that her parents' loving marriage—and the relationships all around her—are far from "normal" or "idyllic." Her assumptions shattered, her journey through *Love You Two* is her process of coming to terms with how the many sexual and relationship permutations she encounters are encouraged or discouraged.

Guisseppina, Pina to her friends and family, is a typical teen girl. She has friends with fighting parents, and sees her own parents as embarrassingly "woggy" (a pejorative term) in their loving relationship. She is on the verge of first-time sex with her own boyfriend, and has an antagonistic relationship with her younger brother.

At the start of the story, Pina accidentally reads an email her mother left open on the family computer, signed off with a phrase her mother uses often for expressing love to Pina and her brother Leo, "Love you r(w)oo." Her mother appears to be having an affair with a family friend, "Uncle Nathan," and her father seems to be aware of it, as the email her mother, Gianna sent to Nathan was copied to Pina's father, Renato.

Pina then pilfers her mother's journal searching for more clues, horrified by the revelation that this has been going on for years without her knowledge, and curious/bothered that her father can be "all right" with it. Through her mother's words of uncertainty, Pina is sent into an emotional tailspin, trying to figure out what is real in her "normal, envied" life. Pina can't confide in her friends, and she has a bad experience with her boyfriend while searching for the emotional truth.

Escaping to her Uncle Don's home by taking an overnight bus to Melbourne, Pina tries to get her head

around everything and learns her Uncle's own hidden truths, as a bisexual man committed to a Vietnamese woman, Wei Lee. Her uncle has named his home "Narnia," and like the world discovered through the wardrobe in the C.S. Lewis classics, it is a place where everyone lives openly. Their friends represent the full spectrum of sexuality and through encounters with these friends Pina's eyes are opened to the many ways people express their love. She becomes more aware there are 'borders' and people hide their true selves—and the many different reasons why.

She works through the why by turning resentful and sad for those hidden lives, when she and Don and Wei Lee travel to Adelaide for the annual Christmas with family. The tension explodes and more old wounds are opened, but with the opening perhaps a healing of their family can at last begin.

It could be argued the author took on too much—trying to tell too broad a story with Pina encountering so many different kinds of loving relationships. However, each encounter is told with great care and love. Readers will be moved by Pina's interactions with John and his partner in Melbourne. Each encounter adds to the nuanced lesson Pina finally weaves into her own life decisions as the story winds to its close.

Choosing to set Pina within a heavily traditional Catholic-Italian family keeps the contrasts sharp between the choices, and the theme obvious. The story avoids stereotypes, mostly owing to the realness of the dialogue, and Pina's inner monologues.

*Love You Two* is a winner with its accurate teen 'voice' and the realism of the struggle with sexuality in all its permutations viewed from the perspective of a person just stepping out to discover her own sexual being. The themes of expectation versus reality, societal "norms" versus living unfilled, are repeated throughout.

*Lara Zielinsky lives in central Florida. She writes and edits fiction for a variety of publishers, and hosts a radio show sharing authors and works of fiction for lesbian and bisexual women. [www.lzfiction.net](http://www.lzfiction.net).*





# Hidden in Plain Slight

by Tracy

## SCENE 1: INTRODUCTION

*The curtain is drawn. Maggie enters stage right, looking distressed.*

**Maggie:** *(sighs)* I don't know what to do. I've told my friends many times that I'm bisexual, but they just don't get it. It's not that they're unsupportive or anything, it's just... Why don't I tell you what happened last week, and you'll see what I mean...

## SCENE 2: COFFEE SHOP

*The curtain is raised. Leslie and Sarah are seated at a round table, drinking coffee. Maggie enters.*

**Maggie:** Hi, Sarah! Hi, Leslie! How are you!

**Leslie:** Hi, Maggie! How are you doing?

**Sarah:** It's so good to see you!

*(Hugs)*

**Maggie:** So, what's new?

**Sarah:** Nothing much. My parents are coming for a visit this weekend. My mom said, "Don't worry. You don't have to clean the house just for us." So naturally, I spent the morning vacuuming and dusting.

**Leslie:** So, Maggie, what's new with you?

**Maggie:** I have a hot date this weekend! I met this guy, Adam, at the gym. He is *gorgeous*! He's tall, with dark brown eyes...

**Leslie:** Whoa...wait a second. A date with a guy? I thought you were a lesbian!

**Maggie:** I'm bisexual. That means I date either men or women. So anyway, about Adam – he has the cutest nose, and...

**Sarah:** Oh, so you're really straight!

**Maggie:** No.... I'm bisexual! Remember Annie – the girl I was with for 3 years?

**Leslie:** Oh, I remember that all right. What a nightmare!

**Sarah:** Oh, God!

**Maggie:** She was the biggest control freak.

**Leslie:** Yeah. I remember one time when we all went out to dinner and she said, "You don't really want the chocolate cake, do you? Doesn't the fruit cup look much better?" As if you needed to lose weight!

**Maggie:** I know. *(Pause)* I wonder what I ever saw in her.

**Leslie:** Attractive, leggy blonde?

**Maggie:** Yeah, that's probably it.

**Sarah:** Well, it's understandable that you would turn straight after a relationship like that!

**Maggie:** I didn't "turn straight." I'm bisexual! I would date a girl if the right one came along. So anyway, about Adam...

**Leslie:** She's saying that she's really a lesbian, but is experimenting with guys for now.

**Sarah:** No, I think that she's really straight, and has been experimenting with girls.

**Leslie:** A three-year relationship is an experiment? No way! Deep down, she's a lesbian, but was temporarily scarred by Annie. But you'll see. She'll come back to girls.

**Sarah:** Oh, come on. Did you see the way she swooned over that guy, Adam? She's definitely straight!

**Leslie:** How about the way she swoons over Halle Berry?

**Sarah:** What about the pictures of Ben Affleck on her wall?

**Leslie:** Did I mention that she owns every Halle Berry film?

**Sarah:** I'm telling you, she's straight.

**Leslie:** She's gay.

**Maggie:** I'm BISEXUAL!!!

*Leslie and Sarah give Maggie an odd look.*

**Leslie:** I don't get it.

**Maggie** *(muttering)*: That's for sure!

**Leslie:** What?

**Maggie:** Oh, nothing

**Sarah:** Maybe it would help if you could explain what "bisexual" means to you.

**Maggie:** OK, let's see... *(thinking)* I like bi-activist Robyn Ochs's definition: Bisexual means the capacity to be attracted to people of more than one gender: but not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily to the same degree, and not necessarily in the same way.

**Leslie and Sarah:** Huh??

**Maggie:** Maybe an analogy would help. Let me think... *(thinking)*

**Maggie:** OK, I got it! It's like handedness. You could be right-handed, left-handed, or you could write well with both hands!

**Leslie and Sarah:** Huh??

**Maggie:** *(sighs)* Ok, how's this: It's like the treble and bass settings on your stereo system. Just because the treble setting is turned on doesn't mean that the bass setting can't be turned on as well.

**Leslie and Sarah:** Huh??

**Sarah:** Oh, I get it!

**Maggie** *(muttering)*: Thank goodness!

**Sarah:** You started out straight. Then, you turned gay for Annie, and now you turned straight for Adam!

**Maggie:** HUH??

**Sarah:** Well, that makes a lot more sense to me than saying you are bisexual.

**Maggie:** THAT makes more sense to you than saying I'm bisexual?

**Sarah:** Well, sure. I don't really believe that bisexuals exist.

**Maggie:** What do you mean I don't exist? I'M SITTING RIGHT HERE TALKING TO YOU!!

**Sarah:** Sorry – no offense. It's just that...well.... I don't really know any bisexuals...

**Leslie:** And it seems like the ones I know are really gay.

**Sarah:** Or they're straight, and just experimenting.

**Leslie:** No, I think that –

**Maggie:** Has it ever occurred to either of you that you don't see bisexuals because we're invisible to you?

**Sarah:** They have invisibility cloaks, like in Harry Potter?

**Maggie:** No, no, no! What I mean is this: Every time I like a girl, I must be a lesbian. But every time I like a guy, suddenly I'm "straight!" What do I have to do to be seen as bisexual?

**Leslie:** Hmm... I guess I never thought of it that way.

**Maggie:** No matter what I say or do, I'm hidden in plain sight!

**Leslie:** Wait! I think I understand.

*Hidden in Plain Sight, continues on page 9*



## Bi of the Month: Elissa Ortiz

by Dina Perrone

*Dina:* Elissa, I have known you for about six years now. But, we really became close when you lived in NYC a few years ago. What I find most amazing about you is your willingness to follow your heart. Can you please discuss how following your heart led you to NYC and then back to Arizona?

*Elissa:* I moved to New York for a clean break. I needed time to myself and I had a friend there, so it was a perfect opportunity at the perfect time. New York was a place I had never been to but always wanted to experience, so I moved to the East Coast. I had lived in Arizona my whole life, and I knew that New York would be a great place to go to experience something different. Living back East was both an exciting and different experience for me. When I was there I was rebuilding my self-esteem along with new experiences and new friends. Unfortunately, I was not yet done with my schooling and I knew staying there would only delay the process. I knew it was better to just get it done with instead of delaying it. Along with school there were of course family, friends and loved ones that I missed dearly. It only seemed natural to me to return to Arizona. It felt like everyone had their lives in place and I didn't, not there anyways. In Arizona, I felt more at home.

*Dina:* I know that being bisexual is not always easy. I am often conflicted, confused, and even scared about coming out. Are you "out" at work or school? How has that affected you?

*Elissa:* I do not go around and flaunt it, but yes, I am honest with my friends and family. Family is harder to deal with because they just kind of brush it off and don't want to know about it or even deal with it. I think the East Coast is much more out and about than the West Coast. When I lived back East it was so much easier to walk around with a girlfriend or even have a PDA. Being "out" here is much harder and people watch every move you make—I think they really have nothing better to do. People out here are very conservative compared to all the liberals on the East Coast (whom I love and miss). Although I have been completely honest with my family and have been open with them about my relationship with a woman for the past four years, they still seem to just "ignore" it. When I am around my friends it isn't even an issue. We don't think about it or bring it up. It is what it is and it is fine, perfectly normal. Around family is harder because I think it is harder for them to accept than it is for my friends. Honestly, the friends I have are like my family so that part is easier since I am so close to them.

*Dina:* You have made incredible achievements as a single mom—working full-time, going to school and buying a home. How have you included dating in this already busy schedule?

*Elissa:* Dating?? Ha ha! Dating with a new baby is almost impossible, babysitters are too expensive and honestly I am too tired. I had a girlfriend until just recently and we decided to go our separate ways. So, at the moment, no, I am not dating.

*Dina:* As a single mom of a beautiful and sweet daughter, do you think being bisexual has affected the ways you parent or who is in her life? Do you mind explaining how?

*Elissa:* I do not think it has affected the way I parent. Parenting to me is about raising a child with manners, morals and love, and being bisexual wouldn't and shouldn't affect that. As for the people in my life, I don't think you can have enough people in your life who love you. As long as they love me and they love my daughter, I have no limits. I believe that my decisions will only broaden my daughter's views in life and make her realize that it isn't important if a man loves you or a woman loves you—as long as they love you.

*Dina:* Is there anything else you would like to tell the readers of *Bi Women*?

*Elissa:* Just do what makes you happy! That is what I did, and what I am doing. Just remember there is no way you can make everyone happy, so instead just do what makes you happy—it is your life, not theirs!

*Elissa and her daughter Charli live in Gilbert, Arizona.*





# Encouraging the Conversation: Thoughts on the Bi Media Summit

by Amanda Morgan

*The Bi Writers Association, with support from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center of New York City, organized "Putting the 'B' in LGBT," a national summit whose aim was to "give people the tools to understand and include the bi community more fully," said bi activist Sheela Lambert, who was also the driving force and primary organizer behind the summit. I was lucky to attend this free conference on May 30th, 2009. Here are some of my thoughts and reactions.*

The most common excuse I hear from lesbian and gay folks, activists and non, for the lack of bisexual inclusion is that we are included. Huh? This is typically followed by an explanation that bisexual people are only made targets for acts of violence and discrimination when we are in same-sex relationships. And if we're single or in different sex relationships well, we can just take our heterosexual privilege and shove it. Because we stop being bi if we're monogamously partnered, right? And we're all so gender-conforming that the only thing that makes us vulnerable is our relationship choices, right? Right.

This ignores the glaringly obvious fact that we remain bisexuals no matter what our relationships look like. Our visibility might change. But who we are does not. And being in the closet hurts. No matter what privilege or lack thereof might come along with it. This also ignores the fact that one's perceived gender or sexual orientation (see also: gender nonconformity) often makes them a target, and this includes bisexuals of all relationship statuses. Bisexuals, like everyone else, are represented across the gender spectrum. Most profoundly, however, this viewpoint illustrates a complete lack of interest in any critical self-examination on the part of the lesbian and gay community when it comes to bi inclusion. While community members may be quick to point out victimization or its absence in mainstream culture, lesbian and gay organizations/media/folks/etc. are experts at avoiding the subject when it comes to their own possible perpetration of biphobia and bi erasure.

The participants of the Bi Summit were having none of that. "Putting the 'B' in the LGBT" called the rest of the queer

umbrella to task. Exactly what are the effects, personally and politically, when we leave bisexual people by the wayside? I promise you, it's more than hurt feelings.

Not to knock hurt feelings. When Peter Ruggiero of the Bi Writers Association spoke of contemplating suicide as a result of being inundated with messages that bi men did not exist, I remembered why I became a bi activist in the first place. Our very lives are at stake here. I was hospitalized for depression as a teenager. While a variety of factors contributed to this, it certainly didn't help that I had a therapist who was telling me I was straight. And where did I find her? The Pink Pages, a New England Resource Directory of LGBT friendly professionals.

Recent research suggests our experiences are not unique. As bisexual columnist Mike Szymanski reported: "Some stats show that bisexual youth particularly have more attempts at suicide and feel more alienated than even their gay and lesbian counterparts who have a growing social and support network around them. A suicide prevention study in Australia found that bi women and bi men were the highest percentages of suicide attempts (35 and 29 percents). Bi youth between 14 and 21, in a University of Minnesota study, were more likely to be suicidal than any other group."

This comes as no surprise. We as bisexuals know the high cost of invisibility. But what about our LGBT organizations? Isn't combating invisibility supposed to be one of their main tropes? Keynote speaker Robyn Ochs addressed the ways in which the mainstream LGBT movement has let us down and contributed to our invisibility instead of helping to alleviate it.

She noted the first problem—people only "see" bisexuals when we are simultaneously partnered with members of both sexes, which is not the reality lived by most of our community. As a marriage equality activist who is married to a woman, Ochs knows firsthand the ways in which media outlets and others have tried to make her bisexuality invisible. She situated part of the blame with the messaging of LGBT organizations and their own biphobia. There were collective nods, laughs and sighs all around as Ochs conveyed the frustration many of us feel with current messaging standards such as "gay marriage"

"We oversimplify our messaging so people will 'get it' but then people

don't 'get it' because we've given them an over-simplistic message...[T]he ick factor with regard to bisexuality is both about a resistance to sex and a resistance to complexity."

Author and activist Ron Suresha also spoke critically of the movement.

"We have a lack of representation on a national level. They [national LGBT organizations] don't have anyone addressing bisexual issues full time. I think that's a problem."

Educator and activist Renata Moreira is feeling the effects of this. Moreira has been unable to secure a visa for the woman she loves. Now, the request for her partner's visa has put her own citizenship in jeopardy. Moreira, who has a green card and is in the process of applying for her citizenship, was previously married to a man.

"Now they are now reevaluating my paperwork because they think my previous marriage might be fake."

This suspicion has caused much stress and pain for Moreira, as well as her ex-husband and family, with whom she is still close, as they are all being subjected to an investigation of the validity of Moreira's previous marriage. An added insult to an already devastating and unfair situation.

Moreira's story illustrates the results of bisexual visibility on a national level. As LGBT organizations continue to do more work around the effects of current immigration law and same-sex couples, this is something we cannot allow them to forget.

Much of the discussion around messaging addressed the ways in which LGBT organizations and the media have failed bisexuals in the course of the fight for marriage equality. *Washington Blade's* news editor, Joshua Lynsen, who is also bisexual, told of how the *Blade* was failing in its coverage of bi people before he got there. Lynsen and Sheela Lambert went over the Bi Writers Association Media Guide to Bisexuality and Reporting on LGBT Issues, which was chock full of suggestions it would behoove not only the media to apply, but whoever has been writing all those "gay marriage" press release as well. \*ahem\*. He then invited any bi people willing to be interviewed or with story tips to contact Lynsen at: [jlynsen@washblade.com](mailto:jlynsen@washblade.com). So if you've got something to say,

**Bi Media Summit, continues on next page**



## Bi Media Summit, continued from page 13

let Joshua know who you are so we can continue to make our voices heard.

Wrapping up the summit was a roundtable discussion that featured LGBT activists, media professionals and politicians as well as bi community activists, that asked 'How can we do a better job?'. GLAAD's Director of National News, Cindi Creager addressed the issue of how LGBT organizations could work

to keep their messaging consistent with a bi inclusive perspective. It was a rousing discussion with many diverse perspectives and as Ann Northrop, co-host of Gay USA, noted, as someone with 39 years of experience in journalism, "People do not like complexity. The human race runs screaming from the room not to deal with this."

Northrop's suggestions for how to move forward? "I want to encourage you to encourage the conversation. Talk more. Think more. Have conversations with everybody."

Northrop had the last word at the summit, but it's my hope that this is just the beginning of a long, complex *inclusive* conversation.

*Amanda Morgan lives in New York City.*

*Note: a poccast of Robyn's keynote is available at [www.robynochs.com/resources/BiMediaSummit.html](http://www.robynochs.com/resources/BiMediaSummit.html)*

## Where's the 'B' in LGBT?

*By Neelima Prabhala*

"Straight and experimenting." "Gay and in denial." "Flat-out confused." These are all responses I've heard to my bisexual identity. I never really know how to go about explaining my sexual orientation to people—How can you reason with someone who claims that bisexuality doesn't even exist? I'm reminded of a Chinese proverb that says, "Those who say it cannot be done should not interrupt those who are doing it."

We live in a world that likes to put people in boxes and say that people are one thing or the other: Black or white; yes or no; gay or straight. But reality is not that

simple. There are shades of grey, for people who identify as bisexual as well as for those who identify as gay or straight or anything else. There are those who are attracted to the person, and regardless of their sex. There are those who are more attracted to men than women, and vice versa. And there are those of us who are simply attracted to all sexes. But a person who identifies as anything other than straight often has the displeasure of dealing with a world that is not accepting. Unfortunately, that is just how it is (even though that doesn't mean we cannot try to change it).

That's not what bothers me most, though. What bothers me most is the intolerance that still exists within the gay community. You would think that people who know what it's like to be discriminated against, left out, and treated like less than they are on the basis of their sexual

orientation would be more accepting and more aware of the bisexuals in their midst. I was at a BAGLY [Boston Area LGBTQ Youth] meeting a while ago and the leader just assumed that everyone present was gay, and then corrected himself to include any straight allies in the room. I felt so excluded, which is completely counter to the point of a group like BAGLY. Many GLBT events fail to acknowledge the presence of the "B" in GLBT. It's difficult enough to not be accepted by the larger society, but not being accepted in a place designed to be a safe haven for people of all sexual orientations is truly a travesty.

*Neelima lives in Boston and is an entering freshman at the University of Connecticut-Storrs. Her hobbies include photography, martial arts and sports.*



Boston Pride 2009. Photo: Lynn Levine

## Lesson #1

*By Lindsay Pratt*

A white moth  
flew in through my bathroom window,  
the draw of light  
like the moon,  
the window  
merely cracked.

As he beat his wing against the mirror—  
a threat against his beauty—  
I reached out my hand  
to help him home.

Hand out the window,  
he held on  
as if with sticky fingers  
while I waved,  
told him:

"It's safer to let go."

With a violent shake,  
he fell free,  
and I shut fast the window  
before I could find out  
if he had found his wings.



# IMPORTANT: PLEASE READ THIS!

Dear Readers,

For many years, BBWN has tried to balance our need to pay our bills with our commitment to being accessible to ALL women, regardless of their ability to pay. For 25+ years, we've just barely managed to "get bi" (pun intended), and meet our expenses.

But things are changing:

People are turning more and more to the Internet for information. Earlier this year, we began offering an electronic option for receiving *Bi Women*. This is an important change, as it allows many more women access to our newsletter, including those who—because of their living situations—cannot receive physical copies of *Bi Women* at home. And it allows our more casual readers to simply go to the [biwomenboston.org](http://biwomenboston.org) website to read *Bi Women* online. But there's a downside to the "information age": people expect things to be free and are less likely to support our work.

But it costs about \$5000 per year to produce *Bi Women* and maintain our website.

Think about it: We offer our subscribers the option of receiving *Bi*

*Women* by postal mail, electronically, or both ways. Our mailing lists – both physical and electronic – are growing, and we have a long-standing policy of sending physical copies *Bi Women* to more than 200 women's centers, LGBT centers, youth and campus groups around the United States and beyond. We request – but never require – payment.

We're also feeling the negative effects of the economic downturn and the increasing costs of supplies and postage, plus *Bi Women* is 4 pages longer than it was two years ago, further increasing both printing and postage costs.

So this year, we're trying a new strategy: instead of having rolling membership renewal throughout the year, we're changing over to an annual fundraising campaign. Every September (THAT'S NOW!), we will send out a fundraising letter and try to raise enough money to sustain BBWN for one year.

**We ask you to reach into your pocket, checkbook or credit card and support our important work. And we are hoping that those of you who are in a position to do so will support us with**

**generous donations, and those of you who can afford only a few dollars will send what you can. If you need your donation to be tax deductible, you can make your check payable to our parent organization, the Bisexual Resource Center.**

**And if it's all the same to you, please think about changing your print subscription to an electronic one.**

You can do all of this on the form enclosed with this newsletter, on the [BiWomenBoston.org](http://BiWomenBoston.org) website, or directly through PayPal, to [biwomenboston@gmail.com](mailto:biwomenboston@gmail.com). Checks can be mailed to BBWN, PO Box 301727, JP MA 02130.

Thank you for supporting YOUR newsletter, *Bi Women*, and BBWN, the oldest bi women's organization in the world! Your support is invaluable in the continuing struggle for bi visibility and the empowerment of bisexual women around the world.

Love from Robyn, your editor



Join us at one of BBWN's fabulous potluck brunches for bi women and our friends. Our brunches are held in women's homes, and ALL women are welcome. See our calendar (pp. 15 and 16) for details.



## Calendar, continued from page 16

**Saturday, November 14, 10pm-2am. Back to School Dance Party.** (See 9/12)

**Thursday, November 19, 7pm Bisexual Social & Support Group.** (See 9/2)

**Saturday, November 21, 11:30am Saturday Bi Brunch.** (See 9/19)

**Friday, November 28, Dyke Night's Fourth Fridays at the Milky Way.** (See 9/25)





## The "Bi Office"

is the Bisexual Resource Center, located at 29 Stanhope Street, behind Club Cafe. For info call 617-424-9595.

### Ongoing Events

#### Last Fridays:

**Bi Women's Rap.** 7:30-9pm at the Cambridge Women's Center, 46 Pleasant St., Cambridge. For info and discussion topics call 617-354-8807.

#### 2nd Mondays:

**Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** 7pm. Email [kate.e.flynn@gmail.com](mailto:kate.e.flynn@gmail.com) for more info.

#### 1st Wednesdays, 3rd Thursdays:

**BLISS: Bisexual Support & Social Group.** 7-8:45pm. Meets at the Bisexual Resource Center at 29 Stanhope St. in Boston. Call 617-424-9595 for info.

#### 3rd Saturdays:

**Biversity Bi Brunch.** 11:30am at Johnny D's, Davis Square, Somerville.

*Sign up for our new email list!*

*Send an email to: [biwomenboston-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:biwomenboston-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)*



# CALENDAR

## SEPTEMBER

**Wednesday, September 2, 7-8:45pm. Bisexual Social & Support Group (BLISS)** meets 1st Wednesdays and 3rd Thursdays of each month at the BRC. All bi & bi-friendly people of all genders & orientations welcome. 1st Wednesday meetings are peer facilitated discussion groups, sometimes with a pre-selected topic or presenter. 3rd Thursday meetings are 7-8 p.m. check-ins, discussion, & announcements followed by social time at a nearby restaurant. Only want to socialize? Meet the group at or shortly after 8 p.m. in the lobby of the Boston Living Center.

**Tuesday, September 8, 7-9pm Bisexual Resource Center Board Meeting.** All bi & bi-friendly community members welcome to attend. Email Ellyn: [president@biresource.net](mailto:president@biresource.net) for more info. Location: BRC office.

**Saturday, September 12, 10pm-2am. Back to School Dance Party,** Dyke Night's Second Saturday at Machine, 1254 Boylston Street, Boston.

**Monday, September 14, 7pm. Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** Peer-led support group for women in a straight marriage/relationship struggling with sexual orientation or coming out. Contact [kate.e.flynn@gmail.com](mailto:kate.e.flynn@gmail.com) for info.

**Thursday, September 17, 7pm. Bisexual Social & Support Group.** (See 9/2)

**Saturday, September 19, 11:30am. Bi Brunch.** (a mixed gender bi group) Johnny D's on Holland St. in Davis Sq. in Somerville, across the street from the Davis stop on the Red Line.

**Thursday, September 24, Celebrate Bisexuality Day (CBD) is honoring new bi books this year. Come out to**

**hear selections from the second edition of *Getting Bi: Voices of Around the World*, Kinsey Zero Through Sixty, and another special guest writer. For details about the event visit [www.biresource.net](http://www.biresource.net).**

**Friday, September 25, Dyke Night's Fourth Fridays** at the Milky Way, The Brewery, 284 Amory Street, Jamaica Plain.

## OCTOBER

**Wednesday, October 7, 6:30-9pm. Bisexual Social & Support Group.** (See 9/2)

**Saturday, October 10, 10pm-2am. Back to School Dance Party.** (See 9/12)

**Monday, October 12, 7pm. Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** (See 9/14)

**Tuesday, October 13, 7-9pm. BRC Board Meeting.** (See 9/8)

**Thursday, October 15, 7pm. Bisexual Social & Support Group.** (See 9/2)

**Saturday, October 17, 11:30am Saturday Bi Brunch.** (See 9/19)

**Friday, October 24, Dyke Night's Fourth Fridays** at the Milky Way. (See 9/25)

## NOVEMBER

**Wednesday, November 4, 7pm. Bisexual Social and Support Group.** (See 9/2)

**Monday, November 9, 7pm Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** (See 9/14)

**Wednesday, November 10, 7-9pm BRC Board Meeting.** (See 9/8)

**Calendar** continues on page 15